I’ve Got a Bad, Bad Feeling: Epistemology and Affect in Literary Studies

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Introduction: Pleasure in the Midst of Apocalypse

This dissertation project was born out of a question that dogged me during the middle portion of my doctoral degree: "is anyone getting any joy out of this?" After all, particularly for graduate students and early career scholars, the professional prospects of this field are grim. Since, as Leonard Cassuto has pointed out, "most prospective graduate students did not fall off the turnip truck yesterday" and know the bleak truth about the state of the field, it stands to reason that most of us pursue it professionally because we have found some aspect of studying literature pleasurable, joyful, or nourishing (qtd. in Pettit, 8). Many may continue to do so throughout their academic careers, but if that's the case, I felt at a loss to find that pleasure manifested in the work of most of the critics I was reading. Literary studies, I thought, operates by a set of rules and assumptions very different from those of lay-readers—but in losing some of the permissions of uncritical reading and interpretation, must we also lose all of the pleasures? What's important to me in this question comes from the immense pleasure that I've experienced in my own reading life—academic and otherwise—butting up against what I perceived to be the affective state of the field, a state that I found at best lacking the joyfulness and pleasure I had previously associated with reading and interpreting literature, and at worst detrimental to the health and well-being of its practitioners.

Since then, the focus of my work has moved beyond a search for pleasure in literary-critical work to encompass a broader range of affects. In moving beyond addressing a perceived lack of pleasure in literary studies, I also moved beyond a focus on ideological critique, a focus that began from my adventures with critics like Rita

Felski, Lisa Ruddick, and Eve Sedgwick,[1] all of whose work features recurrently in this dissertation, and all of whom have argued that techniques of ideological critique generate negative affects. Although this dissertation takes as its starting point conversations that claim critique's role in producing negative affect, my goal in writing it is not merely to add another voice to a growing chorus advocating for changes in literary studies that would lead to more positive and less negative affect. Rather, I consider a number of points of connection between literary-critical epistemology—what constitutes knowledge in literary studies?—and literary-critical affect—what collective feelings, emotions, and moods do our interpretations produce?[2] The critics I've cited above take one particular epistemological assumption—the assumption that texts harbor ideological underpinnings that must be exposed (that creating literary-critical knowledge means discovering and describing these underpinnings)—and connect it with a set of similar affective outcomes—paranoia, suspicion, and other affective states that come along with assuming something is always hidden and that negative surprises are always lurking. While literary studies generally operates from English departments and therefore might appear to outsiders to be a unified field, many critics still don't agree on the basics of what literary

[1] While these critics and a number of others appear recurrently throughout my dissertation, I don't mean to argue here that they're necessarily representative of the field as a whole. Rather, their frequent appearances in this dissertation speak to their shared concerns with the question I started this dissertation wondering about; these scholars are concerned with why there's such a lack of joy and pleasure in literary studies. As I admit at the end of this introduction, the source of the affective state of the field goes beyond the shared epistemological and methodological commitments of any particular corner of literary studies.

[2] I use the term "affect" broadly throughout this dissertation to include emotions, feelings, and moods that can generally be described as either positive or negative. While affects are experienced by individuals, and while I frequently write about them as such, the impetus for this project also came from thinking about affect collectively, and of negative affect in particular as a pervasive state of the field, a practice not uncommon in the critics whose work I address here.

knowledge should be.[3] In my dissertation, I aim to examine some critical assumptions about what literary knowledge is and how we should go about making, discovering, or generating it (the possibility of many metaphors for how literary-critical knowledge comes into the world is key here), and the fact of this variability is itself important in shaping my dissertation's place in the literary-critical conversation I'm jumping into: literary studies is broader and more varied than critique, and the many types of assumptions we find there about literary knowledge help shape the affective possibilities of the field. Rather than singling out one particular epistemological position with its accompanying methodological commitments (the assumption that ideology consistently masks itself and the resulting set of practices labeled alternatively as "critique," "symptomatic reading," and "the hermeneutics of suspicion"), I diverge from other critics by exploring several different assumptions and practices in literary studies that impact affective outcomes in the field. In doing so, I both include more of the kinds of work being done in literary studies and push against the assumption that a simple modification of literary studies' central methodological practices will necessarily solve problems of negative affect.

My opening paragraph of this introduction speaks to the pleasure I've experienced in my own reading life. Partly for that reason, leaving literature itself out of this dissertation in favor of a tighter and perhaps more coherent focus on only the current state of literary studies, was not feasible. As such, I have organized this dissertation

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[3] Gerald Graff documents that long history of difficulties—exacerbated by internal and external pressures on the field—reaching anything like agreement about "what 'literature' was or on its social function or on how it should be read" (208). Ongoing struggles to reach basic agreement about epistemological starting points for literary studies form the basis of my project insofar as they demonstrate the need to consider, from more than one position, how affect is produced in literary studies.

around some of the most influential (and some of my favorite) texts of the British Romantic period, weaving together the connections between epistemology and affect worked out in these texts with current issues in literary studies. My main model for this type of work has been Steven Goldsmith, who in *Blake's Agitation* "describe[s] as specifically (and sympathetically) as possible the deeply attractive enthusiasm—the particular feeling of engaged, dynamic urgency—that characterizes criticism as a mode of action in Blake's own work, in Blake scholarship, and in recent theoretical writings that identify the heightened affect of critical thought with the potential for genuine historical change" (2). Goldsmith's method brings together Blake's own enthusiasm, critical enthusiasm in response to Blake, and critical writing that theorizes enthusiasm. Goldsmith's focus on a single affect—enthusiasm—and single author—William Blake—might seem to narrow his task, but the shifting connotative and denotative meanings of "enthusiasm" over time supply much of the complexity of his book, as does (perhaps this need not be stated) the complexity of Blake's work and the long history of critical engagement with it.

I have taken as my main texts Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, William Wordsworth's 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Jane Austen's *Persuasion* (or, more precisely, the history of reception of Austen's work and *Persuasion* more particularly), and Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*. In their different ways, each of these texts responds to and attempts to work through epistemological pain points and process the affective fallout of those pain points. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* grapples with knowledge on the cusp of a transition between Enlightenment and Romantic thought, a transition happening in tandem with a period of social and political uncertainty and even terror. In

the midst of such uncertainty, Radcliffe manages to create a text that demonstrates the interpretive mistakes that get made when one tries to banish uncertainty through a deep commitment to a particular epistemological position. The Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, assuming a connection between permanent, ownership ties to the land and benevolent "affections," responds to the crisis of industrialization that has steadily severed more and more of those once-supposed-permanent ties to the land and created a troubling state of intellectual and affective affairs. Although Wordsworth does the arguably painful knowledge work of critiquing social institutions, he maintains his stance that knowledge is pleasurable in spite of this. *Sartor Resartus*, published soon after the Reform Bill and manifesting the anxieties of the transition between what we would now broadly label Romantic and Victorian thought, dramatizes the connection between an aggressively empirical approach to knowledge and neurosis manifesting itself as anxiety and depression. I have saved *Persuasion* for last because that chapter departs somewhat from the formula of the others by making its concern the connection between epistemology and affect in critical reception rather than in the primary literary text itself. Negative critical response to Janeite nostalgia for Austen and the Regency period derives at least in part from the need to separate expert, academic knowledge from that of a lay-audience and from the suspicion that nostalgia tends to warp or flatten the possibilities for knowledge.

Taken together, these texts lay out multiple connections between epistemological assumptions and affective outcomes. More specifically, they have correlates in the epistemological assumptions and affective outcomes of contemporary literary-critical practice. This orientation toward literary texts may seem naïve: I am asking that readers

of my dissertation make the assumption that we should, as critics, meaningfully learn from the texts we study, and that we should take lessons from them and carry them into our own work. What I am not arguing, though, is that we should revert to a secular humanist position that assumes that texts carry with them universal or widely applicable moral and social lessons, or that they should provide us with roadmaps for how to live. Perhaps they do, but that is not my concern here. My concern here is with the fact that many literary texts, explicitly or implicitly, actively theorize about what literature is and how we should read and interpret it. Those theories are what we should be considering, testing, and learning from. The importance of doing so is difficult to understate, particularly with texts from the period about which I'm writing: a period of turmoil and uncertainty that also arguably holds within it the beginnings of modern literary criticism. At times the connection between these texts and the literary criticism about which I'm writing may seem loose—that is both a fair criticism of the work of this dissertation and a purposeful choice on my part to model the process of using literary texts to revisit and revise our epistemological positions and their affective outcomes. At times, the process is a loose one of noticing like and like (a similar problem or outcome) and then finding texts' "suggested" or attempted interventions and adapting them to our own use.

In addition to creating fodder for theoretical work that might be used to meaningfully shift the field's affects, it's also useful to consider these texts in parallel with contemporary criticism because it reminds us that: (a) epistemological and affective problems are always there—they must be consistently and carefully worked through in order to keep a healthy field of study alive, and (b) while many of the problems of the crisis in the humanities might derive from institutional and political problems that have

led to the systematic defunding of humanist fields of study (and while the importance of that cannot be understated), there are also portions of the feeling of "crisis" in the humanities that have been the case in times of turmoil and crisis before. So, while we cannot take lessons wholesale from literary texts, their attempts (both through content and form) to grapple with the very problems we're facing now should be taken seriously.

In my first chapter, "Made, Making, Makeable: Epistemological Pleasure in Wordsworth and Now," I connect Wordsworth's critiques of social institutions in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* with the role of critiques of social institutions in literary criticism now. In particular, I'm concerned with the difference in the affective outcomes of these critiques: recent literary critics have seemed to assume that social critique generates negative affects, but Wordsworth articulates a vision of social critique that allows for positive affect. In Wordsworth's vision, the ideal poet takes pleasure in knowledge, even as he critiques social institutions, in two ways: first, he takes pleasure in knowledge itself, even when that knowledge is painful. Second, he takes pleasure in his own knowledge-producing capabilities, in the potential for new knowledge to continue being created. Both Wordsworth and contemporary literary critics assume that reading and interpreting literature have an impact on one's knowledge-producing capacities; in other words, studying literature has cognitive benefits, but only Wordsworth turns that benefit into a positive affective possibility for literary-creative and literary-critical work. In this chapter, then, I bring together Wordsworth's argument and the current state of literary studies to argue that increasing positive affect in literary studies does not necessarily mean giving up on writing resistantly. Ideological critique doesn't in itself guarantee negative affect. In any case, with or without a continued focus on critique, we

could do worse than adopting the baseline assumption that we should rejoice in the very form of literary knowledge and our abilities to create it—that we should all work toward epistemological pleasure as we go about our work.

In my second chapter, "Janeites, Critics, and the Contradictions of Nostalgia," I consider the taboo of nostalgia as a literary-critical affect using the history of critics' reactions to Jane Austen's lay-reader fans as a way into considering the degree to which nostalgia has been unacceptable in literary-critical work to this point and if, and under what circumstances, it might play a role in future critical work. Alistair Bonnet writes about the general disdain for nostalgia amongst both those engaged in left politics and intellectuals (groups with robust overlap in humanities disciplines in particular), noting, "within the realm of political rhetoric, of intellectual activity, of public life, nostalgia is routinely vilified. Indeed a willingness to scorn it remains a ready symbol of progressive inclinations and hard-headed vigour" (Bonnet 5). Bonnet here implies two central criticisms of nostalgia: that it is inherently reactionary, and that it is intellectually compromised by being "soft." Svetlana Boym echoes Bonnet's articulation of past reactions to nostalgia: "Nostalgia in this sense is an abdication of personal responsibility, a guilt-free homecoming, an ethical and aesthetic failure" (xiv). Boym's articulation, whether purposefully or not, also brings to the fore an essential case made in this chapter of my dissertation, that complicity and pleasure need not be inextricably intertwined; Boym here illustrates the tangling together of experiencing something "guilt-free" and "an abdication of personal responsibility," two things that need not necessarily coincide in all cases.

Both Bonnet and Boym make the case for embracing a more nuanced, often contradictory version of nostalgia, and I consider what we might gain by allowing what Boym calls "reflective nostalgia" to be part of literary-critical work. I test out this possibility by attempting to harness some lay-reader nostalgia for Austen's *Persuasion*, arguing that the reader's nostalgia for the kind of romantic attunement she perceives between Anne Elliot and Frederick Wentworth helps us notice tensions between attunement and social constraints in the text in a new way, and that our acknowledgment of our longing for such attunement in no way negates our capacity to understand the detrimental effects of the social constraints that limit Anne's actions and sense of possibility throughout the novel. Considered, reflective nostalgia makes possible new ways of noticing in literary criticism without necessarily dulling the intellectual knives we bring to our work, particularly the work of social critique.

My third chapter, "Anxiety in the Archive: Carlyle's Editor in *Sartor Resartus* and Literary Critics Now," connects Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* to an accumulative, "positivist historicist" tendency in literary criticism ("Manifesto"). In *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle juxtaposes philosopher-genius Diogenes Teufelsdröckh with the fictional Editor of Teufelsdröckh's *Die Kleider*, a hapless British scholar who attempts to translate, edit, and annotate Teufelsdröckh's German philosophy for the benefit of the British public. The Editor works as a proxy for Carlyle's contemporary society, as Carlyle uses him to demonstrate the spiritual sickness that he sees as the inevitable end of an empiricist epistemological position carried to its extremes. *Sartor Resartus* opens with the Editor miscategorizing *Die Kleider* by grouping it with landmark works of natural philosophy, a miscategorization that creates problems down the line as the Editor

continues to treat *Die Kleider* from an empirical-epistemological position, relentlessly attempting to verify fact while tirelessly avoiding a hermeneutic approach. Carlyle dramatizes the Editor's deterioration as he pursues this work, a deterioration that comes about through his suspicion that some of the biographical documents Teufelsdröckh has provided for him have been fabricated and the paranoia that operates on and through him because of his unease over his inability to verify both biographical facts and the seriousness of Teufelsdröckh's more extreme positions. Carlyle therefore shows, through the Editor character, the way that a strictly accumulative empirical approach to knowledge can turn joy and enthusiasm to anxiety and depression and can turn a scholar's affective orientation from a seeking out of positive affect (taking pleasure in work) to a forestalling of negative affect (trying to avoid bad surprises and feelings). I bring this connection between obsessive accumulation of verifiable fact and negative affect into the present by connecting a literary-critical trend of overvaluing epistemological certainty with negative affect in the field. In Brian Connolly's essay, "Against Accumulation," he argues that literary critics have begun to value archival and other materials for the sake of mere accumulation of verified knowledge, rather than for the sake of interpretive value. In *Sartor Resartus*, this logic leads to a physical and mental deterioration for the Editor, and I argue that such practices contribute to the general malaise that Eve Sedgwick and others have identified in literary studies.

In my final chapter, "The Spectre of Uncertainty in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and Literary Criticism Now," I consider two parallel affective "moments," separated by a little over 200 years, but both the result of discomfort with, and intolerance of, feeling uncertain. The first of these "moments" is actually a pattern of moments: the collective

contemporaneous response to Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, particularly to Radcliffe's use of the "supernatural explained," to which readers had disproportionately negative reactions. Many critics before me have read Radcliffe as staging a debate between sensibility and Enlightenment reason, with reason winning out, but I read Radcliffe as resisting the principles of Enlightenment reason and empirical epistemology as well, arguing that she resists a consistent epistemological orientation toward the world by debunking enchantment while also demonstrating the limits of Enlightenment reason. She disrupts her readers' pleasurable certainty and stability in their relationships to the world, and this, not a simple rejection of enchantment, is the source of the disproportionate emotional response.

The second moment is taken from Mary Poovey's article, "Recovering Ellen Pickering," an adapted version of a talk she gave at The British Women Writers Conference in 1999. In it, Poovey gives a brilliant reading of a novel by nineteenth-century author Ellen Pickering, then manages to thoroughly piss off her audience by arguing that Pickering's work doesn't merit recovery for use in research, classrooms, etc. Poovey uses their anger as a jumping off point for considering whether the work of recovery is primarily about texts with inherent value or critical ingenuity on display in linking them to present-day critical concerns. This question of inherent value vs. critical ingenuity implies the question of where meaning lies: does meaning primarily inhere in texts, or is it created by critical interpretations? In this chapter I address recent critics who have assumed the former in order to develop methodologies that work off the assumption that a text is an object much like objects of scientific study. This, I argue, is an epistemological fantasy much like the fantasy Radcliffe addresses in *The Mysteries of*

Udolpho, one created to alleviate the discomfort that comes with feeling uncertain about the status of texts as objects and our methods for creating knowledge about them. Acknowledging and sitting with the discomfort around uncertainty would, perhaps ironically, serve to stabilize the field by preventing booms and busts of methodological interventions created in attempts to banish uncertainty.

This dissertation started from the question, "is anyone getting any joy out of this?" and evolved to consider a broader range of affects and the epistemological and accompanying methodological commitments that might create them. The affective states in the field that I consider here, however, are still largely negative ones: the discomfort that accompanies uncertainty in my chapter on Radcliffe; neuroticism, depression, and anxiety in my chapter on Carlyle; paranoia and suspicion in my chapter on Wordsworth. Addressing these affects and their connections to practices within literary studies and making suggestions for how we might intervene in ways that limited their pervasiveness, has been the work of this dissertation. In closing, though, I'd like, perhaps a bit counterintuitively, to point out the limits of epistemological interventions in addressing these affects. These negative affects, however prevalent, cannot be explained by internal literary-critical practices alone: the current socio-political state of the world, and, more narrowly, the state of humanities and specifically literary departments, have more explanatory power than any epistemological intervention could begin to approach.

The Chronicle Review opens its collected essays released together in 2020[4] under the title "Endgame" by bluntly stating that "The academic study of literature is no longer on the verge of field collapse. It's in the midst of it" (3). In the same set of essays, Simon

[4] Many of these essays had been previously released individually.

During asks whether "the humanities [are] over? Are they facing an extinction event?," coming to the conclusion that "there are certainly reasons to think so" (21). Andrew Kay, whose essay is the longest and perhaps most soaked in feeling of any of the "Endgame" essays, follows up a paragraph documenting massive cuts to language departments and drop-offs in English majors with this assessment:

> None of this shows any sign of relenting. It has, in fact, all the trappings of an extinction event that will alter English—and the rest of the humanities—irrevocably, though no one knows what it will leave in its wake. (49)

A number of essays in the "Endgame" packet address the broader fate of universities, particularly public universities, watching the fate of which Lisi Schoenbach describes as "a pastime not unlike watching the library at Alexandria burn" (36). These essays focus on the larger institutional realities of the crisis: the modern public university has been devastatingly divested of funding, and disciplines like English, unable to keep up in terms of perceived use-value or economic yield, have been hard hit.

To state the obvious, this all feels bad. Really bad at times. Simon During writes of the field that "Bewilderment and demoralization are everywhere," and that's certainly true of the language of these essays (21). Sheila Liming describes the state of the modern public university and her place within it as worthy of "grief," as "grueling," as filled with "many and lingering surreptitious forms of loss—loss of confidence, of spirit, of purpose" (5). An awards dinner, something that might generally be celebratory, is instead suffused with "bleakness," one of "the nonmaterial consequences of material resource depletion, which can last for generations and make earnest attempts at normalcy appear shot through with undercurrents of gloom" (Liming 5). Other scholars use the following

language (and this list isn't comprehensive): "alarm," "grim," "great anxiety," "smarting," "worried," "pretty damned unhappy," "simmering frustration," "melancholy," "unraveled," "ravaging," and "hopeless" (Pettit 7; Cassuto 14; Kay 54, 48, 51). Andrew Kay uses imagery from our current climatological disaster throughout, illustrating the state of the field with images of wildfires and melting glaciers, and evoking all of the grief, hopelessness, and anxiety that come with them (48, 52).

We are awash in possible triggers for negative affect, and most of these triggers exist not internally, in the form of our epistemological commitments and methodological choices, but externally, in myriad forms of divestment from humanistic inquiry in favor of neoliberal instrumentalism, one of the very forces many members of humanities disciplines have dedicated so much work to critiquing. Institutional and disciplinary crisis does come up throughout the body of this dissertation, largely because it cannot be fully separated from the epistemological issues presented here. In my chapter covering Mary Poovey's talk at British Women Writers and Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, for instance, I interpret literary critics' desire to produce more "objective" criticism as a perhaps misguided attempt to bring literary studies into line with standards of knowledge in place in relatively successful academic disciplines. Institutional pressure and a desire to intervene on the crisis in the humanities shows up again and again in interventions in literary criticism. So while this dissertation does not propose solutions to the institutional crisis in which we find ourselves, it both deals with the fallout from it and, however modestly, suggests ways we might weather it with a little less angst.

Made, Making, Makeable: Epistemological Pleasure in Wordsworth and Literary Criticism Now

What is most interesting is that the general sense of fault-finding, or at least of negative judgment, has persisted as primary. This has even led to the distinction of appreciation *as a softer word for the judgment of literature. But what is significant in the development of* ***criticism,*** *and of the* ***critic*** *and* ***critical****, is the assumption of judgment as the predominant and even natural response. (****Critical*** *has another specialized but important and persistent use, not to describe judgment, but from a specialized use in medicine to refer to a turning point; hence decisive.* Crisis *itself has of course been extended to any difficulty as well as to any turning point*). (Williams 85)

In Raymond Williams's *Keywords*, he chooses to treat "criticism" as a word in its most multi-layered sense. Rather than talking only about literary or cultural criticism, a choice that might be allowable given the subtitle of that book, "A Vocabulary of Culture and Society," or separating the general noun from its more particular, specialized sense as applied to literature and others arts, Williams weaves together the history of multiple meanings: its general sense of "fault-finding," its literary-critical use in which it refers to the judgment of literature, and its medical use as "a turning point," with its close relationship to "crisis." I said above that the choice to focus on only literary or cultural criticism would here be allowable, and there is a way in which this is in fact what Williams does. Reading this definition as a literary critic in the present, I experienced a moment of surprise (and the pleasure that comes with recognition) at the way in which the definitions in this passage come together to characterize the current moment in literary studies; would Williams only have changed "interesting" to "controversial," it would have captured the concerns of many critics writing about major issues in the field.

Many critics, especially those who find themselves fed up with critique and other methodologies in literary studies that they take to produce negative affect, would agree that "the general sense of fault-finding, or at least of negative judgment, has persisted as

primary" to the present. The medical meaning of "critical" also resonates: the humanities have perceived themselves to be in the midst of a "crisis" or "turning point" for a prolonged period: there is a way in which the idea of a "turning point," or a constant state of crisis, has itself become part of the way that literary critics define what it means to do literary criticism. While the nature of the "crisis" in literary studies and the humanities more broadly might be defined along a number of lines, including methodological and institutional ones, I will focus primarily on the kind of crisis that follows if we conflate Williams' multiple meanings of "criticism": an affective one.

Williams notes the presence of another word, "appreciation," as an alternative for "criticism" as a literary practice, and this chapter will engage, in part, with a set of critics who argue against fault-finding and toward "appreciation," or at least toward positive affective possibilities—including joy, wonder, and healing—in literary studies. Many of these critics understand literary studies to be predominantly ruled by negative affects and interpret these affects as deriving from the discipline's tradition of social and ideological critique. Using this logic, a turn away from negative affect and toward the positive affective possibilities I've mentioned above requires a turn away from ideological critique. Doing so raises hackles in many corners of literary studies, given what Rita Felski takes to be the field's assumption that "whatever is *not* critical must therefore be *un*critical" (2, emphasis in original). Felski and others with similar positions wish to question this assumption. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, for instance, claimed in her work on reparative reading that to approach texts with positive rather than negative, paranoid affect, "to practice other than paranoid forms of knowing does *not*, in itself, entail a denial of the reality or gravity of enmity or oppression," while Jeffrey Di Leo has

contradicted the idea that to "imagine the cultural and literary world without [critique] is to enter the dark ages of academe" (*Touching* 128; Di Leo 2). In other words, these critics are generally attuned to the worry that giving up on the practices that expose underlying ideologies in texts means adopting a naive view of the world and giving up on a progressive project for literary studies, but they largely reject that worry.[5]

I take the arguments made by these critics to be part of a wider conversation taking place across a number of humanities fields. This conversation might be construed as an ongoing self-questioning, a self-reckoning that asks what the goals of humanistic study should be in the twenty-first century, and, if those goals are (partly) oriented around resistance to power and its abuses, how humanists in general and literary critics in particular can be effective in meeting them. This self-questioning arguably takes the form of self-loathing and perhaps manifests itself in other negative affective modes, with writers describing literary studies' dominant affect as suspicion, or paranoia, among others (Felski, Sedgwick). Critics who describe literary studies in this way sometimes themselves write in affectively laden ways, such as Bruno Latour, who writes with

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[5] I assume in this chapter and throughout this dissertation that literary scholars generally share a progressive or left-political orientation toward the world and their work. This is far from being true of everyone in the field. Still, shared progressive political and social goals are widespread enough that methodologies can be made or broken by their perceived contributions to such a project. For instance, Susan Wolfson seems to assume in *Formal Charges* (which I will discuss briefly below) that a pre-requisite for re-establishing formalism is proving its compatibility with left politics. In "When Nothing is Cool," Lisa Ruddick, having interviewed graduate students about their dissatisfaction with the field, chooses not to meaningfully address the dissatisfaction of graduate students "who bridle at the left-political conformity of English and who voice complaints familiar from the culture wars." Ruddick's relative disinterest in the complaints of graduate students on the right reflects, for me at least, literary studies' general disinterest in becoming more politically varied. Problems for literary studies generally exist within left politics, not about them.

palpable frustration and disgust in "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?"[6] This trend of proclaiming the existence of a widespread affective problem in the humanities is so common at present that it's noticeable when critics take issue with dominant methodologies in a way that doesn't offer an analysis of the affective state of the field.[7] It is generally methodologies that these writers take issue with, though, because they tend to assume that negative affect in literary studies can primarily be addressed through methodological interventions. That is, they assume that particular methodological frameworks are responsible for producing particular affects. I agree with this assumption, but only to a point. Certainly some methodological commitments might entail commitments to particular affective outcomes, as I have argued in my chapter on Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*.[8] But in this chapter I will also argue that assuming a causal connection between social and ideological critique and negative affects oversimplifies

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[6] I admit that it's a bit of a stretch to lump Bruno Latour in with literary critics, but this particular essay of his calls for a methodological decentering of critique that has influenced many of the literary critics I discuss toward making similar calls.

[7] One prominent example of this is Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus in "Surface Reading: An Introduction," in which they take issue with symptomatic reading based on reasonable expectations of methodological effectiveness, but not based on the paranoid or suspicious feelings it produces in individual critics and in the discipline as a whole.

[8] In that chapter I agree with the V21 Collective's manifesto that the "positivist historicism" prevalent in literary studies can produce negative affective results. V21 calls positivist historicism's "primary affective mode . . . the amused chuckle," a description that could be interpreted in a number of ways; given its place sandwiched between accusations of the field's "bland antiquarianism" and its "instrumentalist evisceration of humanistic ways of knowing," I read it as a flat affect, one in which the critic experiences no substantial joy from her object of study. Stanley Fish points out a rather straightforward connection between methodology and affect in Digital Humanities work, claimed that its practitioners' favorite affect is surprise: "digital humanists love to be surprised because surprise at what has been turned up is a vindication of the computer's ability to go beyond human reading" ("Mind").

things, and that negative affective states aren't inevitable outcomes of resistant forms of reading.

Even as I disagree that critique inevitably produces negative affect, I wish to echo and expand upon the arguments of critics calling for the reclamation of positive affect in literary studies, and in doing so I return to a piece of literary criticism considered by M. H. Abrams and many after him as pivotal in the development of the practices of writing both literature and criticism: William Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.[9] In this chapter I will argue that in coming to grips with the affective responses of contemporary literary critics, we would do well to turn back to the Preface.[10] In the Preface, Wordsworth not only lays out an admittedly inconsistent theory for both production and consumption of literature, but also highlights the self-figuring capacity of the poet. Wordsworth's poet not only cultivates a number of skills that help him produce poetry,

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[9] As Abrams notes in the Introduction to *The Mirror and the Lamp*, Wordsworth continues to insist in the Preface that "Poets do not write for Poets alone, but for Men." (26). Still, Wordsworth's Preface marks an admittedly somewhat arbitrary, but handy moment in what Abrams describes as a transition from a focus on audience to a focus on poet that eventually becomes "Carlyle's poet as Hero, the chosen one who, because he is 'a Force of Nature,' writes as he must, and through the degree of homage he evokes, serves as the measure of his *reader's* piety and taste" (26). In the move from Pragmatic to Expressive theories of art, the "poet has moved into the center of the critical system and taken over many of the prerogatives which had been exercised by his readers" (29). I return to Romanticism as a lens for considering critical self-representations because of its historical role in the consideration of the poet as a figure.

[10] I'll admit to a gnawing sense of anxiety at making an argument, so many years after the publication of *The Romantic Ideology*, that we adopt a (partially) Romantic understanding of ourselves as literary critics. Arguing for even considering certain elements of a Wordsworthian worldview seems to produce anxiety in other critics too. Take for instance, Thomas Pfau in *Romantic Moods*, who in asking his audience not to reject "transhistorical claims in Eichendorff or Wordsworth outright," must plead with his readers that his own position not be "construed as a reactionary call" (24). I plead the same open-mindedness and patience from my readers as Pfau pleads from his.

but also has a particular affective stance toward his own capabilities, consciously cultivated or otherwise.

In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* there is an insistence that producing culturally healing work should be joyful, and that part of that joy should derive not from the texts produced, but from the critic's position of being able to do such work. Just as importantly, joy derives from knowledge itself, not in its content, which is often painful, but in its form and in the process of making it. Wordsworth insists on epistemological pleasure that results not only from what is made, but also from making and, crucially, from makeability, the possibility of generating new knowledge that lies within the poet's capabilities. The Wordsworth of the Preface, and more broadly of *Lyrical Ballads*, insists on pleasure in knowledge even as he also insists on producing social critique, particularly of the impact of industrialization and capitalism more broadly at the turn of the nineteenth century.

While some critics, most notably Stephen Goldsmith, have addressed critical experiences akin to Wordsworth's epistemological pleasure, many critics, even those calling for a wider "affective range of criticism" assume that this affective range will broaden by altering our methodological commitments. In the cases where knowledge itself is addressed, it is sometimes associated with negative affect. This is, perhaps, a dangerous route for literary studies to take. Wordsworth's argument in the Preface opens up the possibility that addressing negative affect might be possible even without a movement away from ideological critique, a possibility that is important given many critics' unease at the idea of moving away from resistant forms of criticism. My main goal is not necessarily to defend critique, but rather to resist the assumption that resistant

or symptomatic interpretive modes necessarily yield bad affective outcomes. Either way, what Wordsworth allows us to do is to insist upon epistemological pleasure as a baseline for critical work. Doing so may or may not have the power to make criticism more effective in resisting the systemic evils and abuses of power we see in the world, but in a political and intellectual climate in which epistemological uncertainty reigns, such pleasure might itself constitute a small contribution.

Visions of Improvement: Wordsworth and Now

In the Preface, one of Wordsworth's concerns is to describe and address what he interprets as a major social crisis. In Wordsworth's reckoning, multiple social forces have combined to create a detrimental effect on the minds of his contemporaries. He laments the sad state of the human mind as it exists in a moment in history, claiming as causes for the mind's descent into "savage torpor," "the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies" (64). To this list Wordsworth adds literary crimes: "frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse" (65). Luckily for him, even as Wordsworth laments the factors creating this crisis, he holds out hope based on his assumption that there are ways to combat this crisis, including through the effects of literature, his faith in which reassures him that the process of social decay he's witnessing can only go so far:

> When I think upon this degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation, I am almost ashamed to have spoken of the feeble effort with which I have endeavoured to counteract it; and, reflecting on the magnitude of the general evil, I should be

> oppressed with no dishonorable melancholy, had I not a deep impression of certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind, and likewise of certain powers in the great and permanent objects that act upon it which are equally inherent and indestructible; and did I not further add to this impression a belief that the time is approaching when the evil will be systematically opposed, by men of greater powers, and with far more distinguished success. (65)

As simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar as the causes (not necessarily granting their effects) might seem to a twenty-first century reader, Wordsworth's hopeful holdout against these causes may create discomfort for the contemporary literary critic, particularly because of his earnest assumption that literature has the capacity to create social change (and the universalizing liberal position that underlies that assumption), including by combating the effects of war and capitalism that Wordsworth describes. Many critics hope, and some believe, that literature and literary criticism are capable of social change by both improving the social, emotional, and cognitive capabilities of readers and students and through written resistance of systems of power. We share this basic hope with Wordsworth, but Wordsworth's faith feels naïve both because of our position within an ongoing disciplinary crisis and because of a disciplinary history of critiquing the liberal subjectivity that he assumes in the Preface.

As the passage from the Preface above shows, part of Wordsworth's goal in writing the Preface is to counteract social tendencies. In doing so, he maintains "the Enlightenment's key objectives of cognitive, moral, and social improvement" (Pfau 65). His hope in these goals rests on three certainties. First, that certain of the mind's faculties are permanent and therefore, presumably, incorruptible. Second, that certain objects that

he takes to exist outside history—natural objects—will continue to act on the mind in positive, predictable ways. The combination of these two certainties would seem to ensure a baseline for the human mind *inside* history. No matter what's going on in a particular historical moment, the mind and its objects will continue to act and react in a way that maintains stability.

While Wordsworth maintains Enlightenment goals regarding personal and social improvement, he rejects the idea that those goals can "be realized by the syllogistic and abstract machinations of reason." Wordsworth offers, in the form of the Preface, an alternative that notably "mandat[es] engaged, rather than distracted, reading" (Pfau 65). His final safeguard from cultural and cognitive breakdown is more writing like his. While we might suspect false modesty in his statement that his effort in writing *Lyrical Ballads* is a "feeble" one, Wordsworth assumes that writers will make a sustained, successful effort to counteract historical circumstances that threaten to corrupt the human mind, and therefore corrupt the broader culture. These writers will further the goals of Wordsworth's writing, counteracting cultural and cognitive breakdown through their ministries. Wordsworth, then, puts his faith in two certainties he takes to exist outside history (natural objects and certain stable facets of the human mind) and one within (writers): together, these justify Wordsworth's hope in the socio-cognitive future.

Of course, Wordsworth doesn't expand much on these points. He instead teases us with what Jon Klancher has called "a breathtaking prospectus" of a more substantial version of the Preface's argument, which would include

> a full account of the present state of the public taste in this country, and to determine how far this taste is healthy or depraved; which, again, could not be

> determined without pointing out in what manner language and the human mind act and re-act on each other, and without retracing the revolutions, not of literature alone, but likewise of society itself. (Klancher 139, Wordsworth 58)

This proposed argument, with its promise to describe and evaluate the "present state of the public taste in this country" (a state that the completed Preface suggests *is* in fact depraved), to articulate a fleshed-out theory of language, and to retrace "the revolutions, not of literature alone, but likewise of society itself," would surely develop Wordsworth's sense of ongoing cultural decay and the possibilities for defending against it. As it is, Wordsworth rather halfheartedly (at least in comparison with the "breathtaking prospectus") pursues the issues of taste and permanent human faculties (association of thought and feeling, pleasure in knowledge, etc.). He does so, however, not in service of demonstrating the legitimacy of the hope "that the evil will be systematically opposed," but in service of explaining his own "feeble effort" to "counteract" the cultural forces at play.

Wordsworth's concern is, in part, the decay of taste in society. As fraught an issue as "taste" continues to be for scholars, however, Wordsworth's concerns also run deeper than that, and his articulation of the issues at play has similarities with contemporary critique insofar as Wordsworth is able to point to and describe systemic economic injustices and take to task those responsible for perpetuating them through dishonest rhetoric. In Wordsworth's rendering, broader social and economic circumstances outside of the control of individuals, and certainly individuals of the lower classes, have the potential to change the very possibilities of thought. Wordsworth voices his concerns in the Preface but articulates them most clearly in his letter presenting *Lyrical Ballads* to

Charles James Fox. Wordsworth complains to Fox that there has been for "many years past" "a rapid decay of the domestic affections among the lower orders of society": (

> But recently by the spreading of manufactures through every part of the country, by the heavy taxes upon postage, by workhouses, Houses of Industry, and the invention of soup-shops &c. &c. superadded to the increasing disproportion between the price of labour and that of the necessaries of life, the bonds of domestic feeling among the poor, as far as the influence of these things have extended have been weakened, and in innumerable instances entirely destroyed. The evil would be the less to be regretted if these institutions were regarded only as palliatives to a disease; but the vanity and pride of their promoters are so subtly interwoven with them, that they are deemed great discoveries and blessings to humanity. In the meantime parents are separated from their children, and children from their parents; the wife no longer prepares with her own hands a meal for her husband, the produce of his labor; there is little doing in his house in which his affections can be interested, and but little left in it which he can love. (*Lyrical Ballads* 42)

Shot through as this passage may be with commonplaces about the degradation of the dependent poor, Wordsworth's diagnosis of the contemporary economic state expresses concerns about systemic economic injustice. The poor, far from lazy, have, through the "increasing disproportion between the price and labour and that of the necessaries of life," been rendered dependent upon the state and other institutions. The consequences of major economic shifts include not only the weakening of social ties between members of families, but also the alienation of the worker from his product ("the wife no longer

prepares with her own hands a meal for her husband, the produce of his labor"). Meanwhile, the institutions that perform the services that create dependence and induce alienation "are deemed great discoveries and blessings to humanity" in spite of the fact that the very need for them is contingent on the capitalist disease Wordsworth identifies that creates economic injustice and a need for such intervention (42). Many aspects of Wordsworth's framing of his concerns will not speak to contemporary literary critics (his gendered description of alienation of workers, for example). But still, by tying in "Michael" and "The Brothers" with his comments on economic trends, Wordsworth asserts literature's capacity to create powerful critiques of capitalism, resulting industrialization, and the social institutions that promise improvement while worsening injustice.

Wordsworth assumes that literature can achieve social change both by correcting for the cognitive decline that comes from economic and other broad societal changes and by providing critiques of social institutions and those in power who, wittingly or no, deepen injustice. This second method for achievement works through poems like "Michael" by making visible in the form of an imagined example the otherwise invisible links between the changing economy and disastrous results for poor families. Wordsworth claims that creating the first of these types of changes—cognitive change—in readers comes from the poet's own work at creating cognitive change in himself:

> as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other we discover what is really important to men, so, by the repetition and continuance of this act, our feelings will be connected with important subjects, till at length . . . such habits of mind will be produced that, by obeying blindly and mechanically

> the impulses of those habits, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the being to whom we address ourselves, if he be in a healthful state of association, must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections ameliorated. (62-63)

By cultivating his own capacities, the poet is able to produce work that, assuming the reader is "in a healthful state of association," will cognitively and morally improve that reader.

Wordsworth's Poetic Self-Figuring

In the Preface Wordsworth develops a description not only of literary expertise[11] (largely poetic, but also critical) and of the literary expert's abilities, but also of the literary expert's attitudes toward that expertise and toward those abilities. Notably this attitude is one of hope invested in the efficacy of literary work, pleasure in the knowledge gained through methods of research and literary practice, and satisfaction in the workings and abilities of the mind. This abundance of positivity is notable in contrast to some (but not all) contemporary critics who demonstrate their frustration with literary studies by describing it in terms of negative affect. In many cases the frustration is lobbed at particular methods or schools of critical thought, especially with critique as a widespread practice (and sometimes with New Historicism as a dominant approach).

Acting as both poet and literary critic, Wordsworth produced, in the form of the Preface, a document at once craft essay and literary theory. Setting himself apart from professional reviewers, who would misguidedly "establish a canon of criticism which the

[11] Because I'm applying portions of Wordsworth's arguments about poets to literary criticism now, I use "literary expert" and "literary expertise" as general terms useful for both sets of issues.

Reader will conclude he must utterly reject, if he wishes to be pleased with these volumes," Wordsworth departs from then current practices in criticism and gestures toward a critical practice that looks much more like our own (67). While Wordsworth does in some ways act like contemporaneous reviewers, his project in *Lyrical Ballads* is, as Michael Mason points out,

> a uniquely bold conjunction of prescriptive literary theory and poetic practice. Eighteenth-century critics had written treatises, long and short, on literary theory, but (although some of these men were also poets) they had not offered original poetry in proof of their views . . . This aspect of Wordsworth's Preface has a momentous effect on the theory itself: 'after him it becomes awkward to derive criticism from abstract rules whose validity is glibly assumed as axiomatic.' (56)

Wordsworth meaningfully departs from his contemporaries when it comes to the form of his writing by essentially putting his money where his mouth is: he advocates for ways of writing and ways of reading and then demonstrates (or, to be a little less generous, attempts to demonstrate) the feasibility of his theory through his poems. Some critics, not least Samuel Taylor Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria*, have questioned whether Wordsworth's poems in fact align with his poetic theory, but as noted above, the attempt meaningfully shifts the paradigm for acceptable evidence in literary-theoretical texts.

As such, the Preface participates in boundary work that draws lines between literary experts and non-experts. This is not to deny that Wordsworth's text meaningfully democratizes reading, particularly in terms of sensibility or, more broadly, affective experience.[12] This is also not to say that Wordsworth creates a strict, impermeable

[12] John Mullan points out that in the eighteenth century, writing about sensibility tended to formulate its origins paradoxically: sensibility must be natural, but was simultaneously a product

delineation between experts and non-experts (though perhaps the proper distinction should instead be drawn between literary expertise and non-expertise). It is rather to say that Wordsworth holds out on certain qualities of literary experts,[13] both poets and readers, refusing to grant them to everyone and at times advancing his argument based upon these types of distinctions. In drawing these distinctions, Wordsworth not only describes what it means to be an expert in terms of what skills and faculties are needed to meaningfully produce, evaluate, and otherwise respond to literature, but also in terms of capacity for self-reflection on those skills. In other words, Wordsworth has expectations for how the literary expert thinks and feels about himself.

While this subject doesn't take up an especially large portion of the Preface, its thematic importance is underscored by two things: (1) Wordsworth expands upon his treatment of it in the 1800 edition with the addition of the "What is a Poet?" section in the 1802 edition, and (2) Wordsworth reorders the poetry in *Lyrical Ballads*, beginning in the 1800 edition, so that "Expostulation and Reply" and "The Tables Turned"[14] appear first and second in the collection. In the 1798 edition, Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner" appears

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of refinement. Wordsworth loosens the boundaries around sensibility by positing that any reader, "if he be in a healthful state of association, must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections ameliorated" (63). John Morillo, on the other hand, notes that Wordsworth does attempt to universalize, and thereby democratize, the passions, but that Wordsworth remained cautious about disrupting traditional social hierarchies by so doing. The solution, says Morillo, is for Wordsworth to figure "moments of enthusiasm" as "an imaginative kind of private property" (44).

[13] See Brian Goldberg's essay, "'Ministry More Palpable': William Wordsworth and the Making of Romantic Professionalism," for an account of expertise's role in Wordsworth's formulation of his professional identity. Goldberg writes that for Wordsworth, the problem of becoming a professional poet was how "to retain gentility while replacing the bad old system [based on status] that rewarded connections with a good new one that acknowledged talent and skill systematically instead of haphazardly" (331).

[14] Hereafter I will refer to these poems as "ER" and "TT" for the sake of brevity.

first, while "ER" and "TT" are the eighteenth and nineteenth poems, respectively. Many critics have speculated about why Wordsworth chose to remove "Ancient Mariner" from the first spot in the volume, but the question of why "ER" and "TT" appear in its place is one that remains largely unexplored. This may be due in part to Wordsworth's own desire, stated in a letter to Joseph Cottle, to replace "Ancient Mariner" with "some little things which would be more likely to suit the common taste" (Letters, 264). Such a statement may well suggest that "ER" and "TT"'s only function was to serve as a more accessible entry to subsequent editions, but I contend that they also meaningfully renew several key issues addressed in the Preface, including that of the origins of literary knowledge and expertise.

As Brian Goldberg has pointed out with reference to these two poems, both Wordsworth and Coleridge "do not denounce the systematic training and use of intellect, and when they consider questions of methodology both endorse accumulated knowledge and emphasize the value of specific, relevant experience: when Wordsworth advocates Nature as teacher, he is really proposing a form of research" (335). The two poems together make up a sort of mini-manifesto on what constitutes proper education, particularly in regard to literary expertise. Especially given their placement just after the Preface, we can read these two poems as complementary takes on the best source from which the poet can gather the knowledge he needs to do his work. Both portray Wordsworth's preferred "form of research" in affectively compelling terms. In "ER," we get a partial defense of learning through traditional study by William's interlocutor, Matthew, only to have that defense undone by William's reply. That Matthew's argument is the less compelling of the two is reinforced by William having the last word, and

particularly by Mattthew's imagery as he suggests that William "drink the spirit breathed / From dead men to their kind," a viscerally disgusting alternative to William's preferred mode of sitting on a rock by Esthwaite Lake, "When life was sweet, I knew not why" (7-8, 14). In "TT" we feel the affective contrast between these two methods of accumulating knowledge even more sharply: the poem's narrator assumes that his book-reading friend is engaged in "toil and trouble," whereas he could be encountering "Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health, / Truth breathed by cheerfulness" (2, 19-20). The two poems' images of respiration create an embodied contrast between the feelings associated with both kinds of research. Not only do "ER" and "TT" help turn our attention back to the subject of literary expertise after the Preface has ended, but they also reinforce Wordsworth's insistence on centering affective experience in determining how best to achieve literary expertise.

In the "What is a Poet?" section of the Preface, Wordsworth describes both the acquired aspects of being a poet—those things that a man takes on when he decides to write poetry (his duties, his relationship to his readers, his education)—and the natural inclinations and capacities of the poet. But Wordsworth's description (if something so prescriptive can be called a description) of the poet doesn't just focus on his attitudes and abilities with regard to the poetry he writes, it also focuses on the poet's self-reflection, both intellectual and affective. The first declarative statement answering the questions that open the "What Is a Poet?" section starts with the first two concerns—the status and natural tendencies of the poet—but quickly introduces the poet's self-attitude:

> He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endued with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of

> human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man *pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men* in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting in the goings-on of the universe, and *habitually impelled* to create them where he does not find them. (71, my emphasis)

Wordsworth's poet is both "pleased with his own passions and volitions," and "habitually impelled to create." Wordsworth's poet takes pleasure in both his passive powers (he is "habitually impelled" to create "goings-on" "where he does not find them") and his active ones (he is pleased with his own volitions, his own willfulness).

The passions and volitions that the poet is so pleased with, we remember, are the result of not only his "organic sensibility," but also his having "thought long and deeply" until he is capable of positively affecting a reader "in a healthful state of association" by "obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits" (we might take "impulses of those habits" to be the obscured subject of the passive construction, "habitually impelled" that occurs later in the Preface) (62-3). The practice of poetry and other forms of "research" necessary to a career as a poet yield other affective results: the poet "has acquired a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels" (71). Having "a greater readiness" might be here be read to mean not only "more prepared," but also "more willing."

A push and pull exists for a poet between having "a greater readiness" and being "habitually impelled," and Wordsworth continues this tension throughout the "What is a Poet?" section. The poet's role in expressing the passions of men, for example, seems to derive itself from this very tension. On the one hand:

> However exalted a notion we would wish to cherish of the character of a Poet, it is obvious that, while he describes and imitates passions, his situation is altogether slavish and mechanical, compared with the freedom and power of real and substantial action and suffering. (72)

The remedy for this seems to be the poet's evacuation of self, "for short spaces of time perhaps to let himself into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs" in order to bring his representation of passion as close to the "power of real and substantial action and suffering" as possible (72). Wordsworth is careful to differentiate this process from the work "of a translator, who deems himself justified when he substitutes excellences of another kind for those which are unattainable by him" (72). The need for the poet not to consider himself as a translator is first and foremost argued on the grounds that to consider the role of the poet in this way would "be to encourage idleness and unmanly despair," two attitudes that are contemptible not only generally speaking, but also particularly for the (male) persevering poet (73). This is one of a couple of points at which Wordsworth rejects a negative affective response to the poet's encounters with reality; the poet confronts his inability to fully match "real and substantial action" and responds with pleasure.

The poet's particular work is the work of sympathy; the knowledge that he must create is the knowledge of people, and since we have "no sympathy but what is propagated by pleasure," the work of the poet is pleasurable work. But Wordsworth doesn't only tie pleasure to the kind of knowledge created by the poet. All knowledge creation is intimately tied to pleasure,[15] and

[15] The exact relationship is tricky. Is it a dependent relationship, as in, "We have no knowledge - that is, no general principles drawn from the contemplation of particular facts - but what has been

> The Man of Science, the Chemist and Mathematician, whatever difficulties and disgusts they may have had to struggle with, know and feel this. However painful may be the objects with which the Anatomist's knowledge is connected, he feels that his knowledge is pleasure; and where he has no pleasure he has no knowledge. (75)

Wordsworth here emphasizes that even the painful parts of human life, whether they be the domain of the poet, Chemist, or Anatomist, create pleasure insofar as people can take pleasure in creating and acquiring knowledge. Though both are intimately tied to pleasure, there is one important difference between the type of knowledge created by the poet and that produced by the Man of Science:

> the knowledge of the one cleaves to us as a necessary part of our existence, our natural and unalienable inheritance; the other is a personal and individual acquisition, slow to come to us, and by no habitual and direct sympathy connecting us with our fellow-beings. The Man of Science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude; the Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion. (76)

Again, Wordsworth emphasizes the difference between the truth sought by the Poet and the truth sought by the Anatomist. The knowledge of the poet is knowledge through

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built up by pleasure, and exists in us by pleasure alone"? Is it an identity, as in, "However painful may be the objects with which the Anatomist's knowledge is connected, he feels that his *knowledge is pleasure*" (75, my emphasis)? This never quite gets resolved, with the ambiguity only renewed as he closes a long paragraph on the topic, noting that man's experiences "excite in him sympathies which, from the necessities of his nature, are accompanied by an overbalance of enjoyment" (75). "Accompanied" neither commits Wordsworth to causality or equivalency, nor rules out either of these possibilities.

representation. He represents a truth that is accessible to others, one that he seeks out, but doesn't discover. The Man of Science must, through solitary labor, discover the truth—that which is "remote and unknown"—as opposed to what is "our visible friend and hourly companion."

The poet that Wordsworth imagines in the Preface not only takes pleasure in his own capacities as the type of man who can be a poet, but he takes pleasure in the knowledge that he produces because it is knowledge, and because of the special type of knowledge that he has been entrusted with. Moreover, Wordsworth's poet not only should take pleasure in his own capacities and the knowledge that he produces, but in certain ways he must do so. As Thomas Pfau has pointed out, Wordsworth treats feelings as a precondition—or something close to a precondition—for thought, and therefore for the work of poetry:

> Throughout the *Preface*, we witness a strategic alignment of 'repeated experience and regular feelings' . . . it being Wordsworth's contention . . . that emotion or feeling relates to thought the way climate relates to local weather conditions. (Pfau 64)

While climate's relationship to local weather conditions isn't always direct, the climate in a location generally constrains and makes possible a range of particular weather events. For Wordsworth, the affective condition of the poet (and also of the reader) meaningfully constrains the types of thoughts and therefore the type of work that he can produce. The poet takes pleasure in his own cognitive process, his own status as a practitioner of a craft; that his craft is intimately tied up with knowledge, and the knowledge is intimately tied up with pleasure, reinforces his pleasure in self-reflection, but does not authorize it.

The pleasure of self-reflection starts and constrains everything that comes after. This self-reflection should not, at least in this context, be read as narcissism,[16] but instead a pleasure that derives from knowledge as form and from the process of bringing knowledge into existence. The poet takes pleasure in his knowledge-producing capabilities, and he takes pleasure in knowledge itself regardless of the content of that knowledge (painful or pleasurable knowledge, disgusting or appealing knowledge, all knowledge is pleasure).

Perhaps, though, this formal pleasure in knowledge creates some discomfort in the contemporary reader. Why should we think of knowledge as pleasure, anyway? If poetry is the work of sympathy, and poetic knowledge is, like all knowledge, pleasurable knowledge, perhaps we *should* all feel some discomfort; should we take pleasure in others' suffering,[17] especially as suffering makes up a large part of the subject matter of Wordsworth's poems? Michael Mason points out this possibility in his introduction to the Longman edition of *Lyrical Ballads*: "On the face of it, the doctrine that it is in the nature of man to contemplate everything, including suffering, with an 'overbalance of

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[16] I am, I suppose, skirting around Keats's definition of the "poetical Character" as "distinguished from the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime." For Keats, Wordsworth's poetry refuses a model of the poet as a "camelion" with "no self." At least with regard in the Preface (*The Prelude*, for instance, presents an entirely different challenge to defending Wordsworth), I think that Wordsworth remains so interested in the form of knowledge—from the poet's need to learn how to avoid arbitrary connections between objects and feelings to his pleasure in the process of creating knowledge, even painful knowledge—that while he might not count as a "camelion poet" he also can't be counted as its opposite.

[17] The idea that we take pleasure in sympathizing with another's pain has a history that long precedes Wordsworth. Early in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith outlines this phenomenon: "Just as the person who is primarily concerned in any event is pleased with our sympathy and hurt by the lack of it, so also we seem to be pleased when we can sympathize with him and upset when we can't. We run not only to congratulate the successful but also to condole with the afflicted; and the pleasure we get from contact with someone with whom we can entirely sympathize in all the passions of his heart seems to do more than compensate for the painfulness of the sorrow that our knowledge of his situation gives us."

enjoyment' could lead to an absurdly and horribly complacent picture, a world in which no one is distressed by another's suffering" (30). But Mason also emphatically contests this reading of the Preface (and *Lyrical Ballads* more broadly), arguing instead, with reference to "Simon Lee," that Wordsworth "is several moves ahead of his readers," and that

> Persuasive though expressions of solidarity with Simon Lee may be, it is important to see that they involve us in a contradiction into which Wordsworth's poetry often draws its readers. We speak as if it is we, in our anguished sympathy with the sufferers in these poems, who have a privileged acquaintance with them, while the poet's apparently more cheerful view is unctuous, impertinent and ignorant. The position has only to be stated for its absurdity to appear. It is the poet, with a series of very telling details, who has aroused our indignation with Simon Lee in the first place. As usual Wordsworth, a supremely intelligent poet, is several moves ahead of his readers. (30-31)

Mason goes on to explain why this is the case, continuing his light admonishment of critics who mistake their outrage over Simon Lee's experiences for moral superiority over the seemingly callous Wordsworth:

> He has gone beyond the realm of human pain into the altogether more difficult territory where it can be asked how this pain counts in the whole life of mankind. We tend to stay halted in front of the wonderful icons of suffering that he has created on route, as if they were our discoveries. In the territory beyond there are certainly dangers of an unacceptable complacency, but we can at least agree with Wordsworth that human life is 'an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure,' and

> that the ultimate verdict on Simon Lee cannot be a wholly black, indignant one, simply because he is a living and conscious man. (31)

Mason's defense of Wordsworth highlights two important aspects of Wordsworth's theory in relation to his own poetry: in his poetry, Wordsworth knows the difference between representation and reality. Wordsworth crafts not an indifferent replica of reality (after all, the poet can never match "real and substantial action" anyway), but a process by which a reader both sympathizes with and takes pleasure in the experience of knowledge that sympathy brings. Mason's defense shows that for Wordsworth, pleasure in knowledge does not commit you to a naive position, or one that doesn't acknowledge suffering in many forms, including the kind of suffering (which Simon Lee experiences) that happens as a result of structural barriers to leading fully autonomous lives. In the final line of Mason's introduction, he wraps up the sections of writing I've already included with a prescription for Wordsworth's readers: "The rule to be learnt is one that the reader of Wordsworth's poetry can never afford to forget: do not underestimate the challenge it offers" (31). There is nothing, Mason suggests, naive, complacent, or unsophisticated about Wordsworth's acknowledgement of pleasure. This pleasure, the "overbalance of enjoyment," that we experience, happens when we "contemplate everything," or, in other words, whenever we contemplate anything. Thought, and the creation of knowledge, is itself pleasurable, no matter the form of that knowledge.

Cognitive and Social Improvement Now

Literary studies today continues both of Wordsworth's claimed uses for literature, or at least literary criticism, although in most cases these two kinds of argument remain separate from one another. Before I describe what I take to be important

overlaps between Wordsworth's goals and the goals of contemporary critics, I'd like to address the question of considering Wordsworth, a poet, alongside ourselves as literary critics. Why consider a poet as a model for critics? While the two types of work don't perfectly correspond with each other, literary criticism has, over the course of the last two centuries, consistently reproduced a conflict between considering the "text as object of critique," an object about which knowledge is made by the critic, and "the text as bearer of knowledge or wisdom" (Shumway 21). Wordsworth writes under the assumption that poets are those who produce "knowledge or wisdom," while many contemporary critics operate under a duel assumption that both poets and critics, or sometimes primarily critics, produce knowledge. In short, Wordsworth sees himself as the primary expert producer of literary knowledge and so do we.

Back, then, to the multiple uses for literature, or rather for literature and literary criticism together. Contemporary criticism would hardly admit to being concerned with "the evil" at hand as Wordsworth defines it. Correcting the "state of almost savage torpor" that Wordsworth attributes to the human mind (with all the social consequences of many minds in such a state) feels like an odd and, frankly, offensive way of stating twenty-first century criticism's aims. Many critics would not use the same language as Wordsworth in describing the change that will come over his reader: he "must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections ameliorated" (63). Still, the argument that studying literature can induce personal improvement in a reader has hardly disappeared, though it's as often (or more often) made by public champions of the

humanities[18] as by academics themselves.[19] I take Wordsworth's argument about social improvement to be utopian insofar as he argues that it's possible to preserve and model through literature what he perceives as being rapidly lost socially. From Wordsworth's perspective, the Preface and *Lyrical Ballads* has the potential to preserve an ideal, juster version of the world and to train its reader to help bring that world back into being. That said, while literary critics now meaningfully carry forward some of Wordsworth's goals, this faith in literature as a preserver of what is most meaningfully human, and the poet as being entrusted to carry and convey that knowledge, is no longer primary. Because it would be much more common for literary critics now to assume that literature reproduces the very social "evils" and ideological commitments that Wordsworth assumes it can combat, literary studies today largely places its faith not in literature itself, but in sustained literary study.

As University resources and undergraduate enrollments tip towards STEM fields and the never-ending humanities job crisis marches on, people continue to justify the use-value of literature not only in terms of economic arguments (that you gain useful job skills from studying English), but also cognitive and moral ones (that you become a

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[18] Leon Wieseltier, writing in the vein of his 2013 *New Republic* article, "Crimes Against Humanities," in which he defends the humanities from Steven Pinker specifically and from scientism more generally, comes to mind as an example.

[19] This is not to say that these arguments don't also come from the mouths of academics. In a 2017 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article about institutional injustices in the humanities, for example, Kevin Birmingham notes the irony (possibly echoing Lisa Ruddick, who I will discuss more below) that "We tell our students to study literature because it will make them better human beings, that in our classrooms they will learn empathy and wisdom, thoughtfulness and understanding. And yet the institutions supporting literary criticism are callous and morally incoherent." Birmingham's talk-turned-article delivers a rather devastating indictment of the current system of labor in the humanities and ends by reflecting on this institutional crisis in much the same way—with a concern about negative affect— that many of the scholars I discuss write about methodological crises: "This is what literary criticism feels like." For Birmingham, it feels pretty terrible.

better citizen, or at least a more fulfilled individual), and these types of arguments often blur together. Consider a relatively recent spate of articles, generally drawn from a 2013 study published in *Science* under the title "Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind," in popular magazines and on popular websites with titles like, "Novel Finding: Reading Literary Fiction Improves Empathy," and "For Better Social Skills, Scientists Recommend A Little Chekhov," to see the ways in which literature and other arts' use-value continues to be predicated on its ability to improve our cognitive faculties.[20]

Those who don't buy into the supposed moral benefits of literature like increased empathy can still point to other gains. In John Carey's *What Good are the Arts*?, he argues for the special place of literature among all of the arts (other forms of art, he argues, don't have much evidence that they improve people):

> Let me be clear what I am claiming. I am not suggesting that reading literature makes you more moral. It may do, but such evidence as I have come across suggests that it would be unwise to depend on this. Envy and ill-will are, I should say, at least as common in the literature departments of universities as outside . . . My claim is different. It is that literature gives you ideas to think with. It stocks yours mind. It does not indoctrinate, because diversity, counter-argument, reappraisal and qualification are its essence. But it supplies the materials for

[20] Notable, and perhaps a little worrisome to those prone to worry, is the fact that the titles of the articles list three closely related, but not-quite-equivalent benefits: improved theory of mind (the ability to ascribe mental states such as beliefs to oneself and others), improved empathy, and, mysteriously, improved "social skills." In addition to the looseness of cognitive and emotional categories here, there's also the admittedly anecdotal evidence of our experiences in literature departments, where we've all met our share of well-read people who never got the memo about having their empathic and other social skills improved.

> thought. Also, because it is the only art capable of criticism, it encourages questioning, and self-questioning. (208)

Carey's arguments, placed alongside the findings about empathy in literature, sing a familiar tune, especially in terms of how undergraduate education in English gets sold: a major in English will teach you "critical thinking," it will teach you "empathy," it will teach you "creative thinking." Reflecting on Kant's "What is Enlightenment?" as the "classic modern statement" of the "idea that freedom depends on the capacity to think critically," Stephen Goldsmith speaks to the prevalence of this thinking by admitting that "one can hardly imagine a defense of the liberal arts today without it" (269). Having majors in English makes society better by improving students morally and cognitively, with bonus points tacked on for instrumentality—the fact that some of those cognitive skills can be turned into economically vital job skills. We still like to think, with Wordsworth, that a decent reader, with the help of a good poet (or now, a strong teacher-critic) "must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections ameliorated."

Proponents of the benefits of studying literature tend to focus on how students can be transformed by it (they are often enough making these arguments in the context of convincing prospective students that English is a reasonable use of tuition dollars), and perhaps somewhat on the benefits of these individual transformations to society as a whole. But assuming there really are benefits, they also have the potential to accrue to literary scholars, along with the pleasure those enlivened capacities create. In Susan Wolfson's book, *Formal Charges*, she connects the time, investment, and expertise needed to write formalist criticism in particular with positive affect. In making this argument, she calls on Wordsworth's Preface to echo his concern that those who do not

spend much time studying poetry may produce judgments that are "erroneous." Wordsworth expects readers to dedicate time to reading poetry in order to better their judgment, as does Wolfson: "Reading is enlivened by this investment, and its attention to particularities refines judgment"(1). Wolfson means for us to invest time over both the long and short term, with literature broadly and with individual pieces of literature through close reading: better judgment and improved capacities come about for those who have studied literature long enough to become experts in the field ("long continued intercourse") and from the act of producing formalist criticism (time spent with one poem) in particular.

Wolfson argues for this time investment in order to position formalist criticism as a politically responsible, resistant method of interpretation, but I would argue Wolfson's argument also serves as a contemporary example of Wordsworth's insistence that knowledge is pleasurable even when the content of that knowledge is painful, and that the pleasure of knowledge comes significantly from the ability to rejoice in the capacities that create while they are in action. Wolfson's title, *Formal Charges*, plays on critiques of formalist criticism that have deemed it retrograde but contains within it the potential of Wolfson's argument that formalist interpretation induces "charged affect" that signals to the critic the efficacy of their work. The pleasurable "charged affect" that Wolfson's scholar experiences derives from their critical capacities being put into action in such a way that a sense of efficacy and agency is created: this "charged affect" "is not merely the result or supplement of agency, but the index of agency as it happens. It persuades us, right here and now in the nervous system, that we are already actively resisting as we read" (Goldsmith 284).

While Wolfson maintains optimism that literary criticism can be efficacious in creating change in the world, for many (if not most) other critics, doubt creeps in:

> the professionalization of knowledge production and the specialization of critical practices makes it impossible for us not to worry [. . .] that intellectuals participate in 'a tacit compact among the learned as a privileged order,' or that the institutional conditions of our training and our labor make significant innovation increasingly unimaginable, or that our work in words has little demonstrable relation to change in the world. (Goldsmith 39-40)

Stephen Goldsmith here expresses a number of anxieties that he sees in literary critics, among including the anxiety that literary criticism cannot innovate precisely because it is created by literary critics who have had particular, specialized training—a concern that opposes both Wordsworth and Wolfson's assumptions that at least some types of training can build capacity for resistance and strengthen positive affect. Goldsmith doesn't quite establish cause and effect between that anxiety and the next, "that our work in words has little demonstrable relation to change in the world," but their proximity in the list is highly suggestive.

Among other motivations, the anxieties that Goldsmith describes have compelled scholars like Wolfson to reevaluate their methods for feeling their "activism taking root in the world." Wolfson proposes a return to formalism as a viable method for continuing a progressive project, but my focus in this chapter is on considering the field's frustrations with critique in particular because, as Jeffrey R. Di Leo points out in the introduction to *Criticism After Critique*, "critique has become the modus operandi of the humanities. Those who dare to question it, do so at their own peril" (1). Generally

thought of as our primary vehicle for resistant reading, many critics, apparently at their own peril, have begun to question critique, or at least the enormous place that it holds in literary studies' toolkit.

While some of this questioning concerns critique's efficacy, frustration with critique as a practice also largely comes from its perceived negative affective orientation toward the world. The logic of those who find themselves fed up with critique goes, very broadly, like this: because social and ideological critique is the central practice in literary studies and because critique requires paranoia, distrust, and other bad feelings, the central affects of literary studies have become negative ones. Frustration with critique also concerns its effectiveness. Bruno Latour, hardly a literary critic, but deeply influential to many in the field, addresses this concern in his 2004 essay, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?" Writing in the midst of the turbulent years of the Bush administration, Latour uses images and metaphors of war to point out the ways in which methods and assumptions that undergird critique have run amok and fallen into the hands of right-wing conspiracy theorists, climate-change deniers, and others whose agendas run counter to the agendas of many in the academy. Lisa Ruddick, in "When Nothing is Cool," takes issue not only with the bad feelings that she believes widespread use of critique (particular in terms of its relationship to the concept of the self) has created, but also the practical effects it has had on labor in English Departments: "The poststructuralist critique of the self, though associated with progressive politics, has an unobserved, conservative effect on the lived world of the profession. It protects the institutional status quo by promoting the evacuation of selves into the group." Graduate students in particular are vulnerable to "absorb[ing] the message that they have no boundaries against the profession itself," a

message that increases the sense that one must conform to the ideology of the field in order to compete in a highly competitive, highly hierarchized environment.

Scholars might not always think that critique's attempts to expose injustice are particularly effective,[21] but they don't take issue with the social goals of lessening those injustices. The importance of a left-political tendency in literary studies is generally assumed and sometimes provides the fuel for the argument's existence. I quoted Stephen Goldsmith above about the worry over whether scholarly activity can produce change in the world, and it seems that the writers I've cited here also feel that anxiety: is there any way for literary scholarship to create positive social effects? And are our current methods in any way effective? Perhaps this anxiety is where we differ most from Wordsworth, who had all faith that "the time is approaching when the evil will be systematically opposed, by men of greater powers, and with far more distinguished success."

Epistemological Pleasure Now

Many of the critics who have expressed frustration with critique have also expressed hope in changing the profession to reflect a broader affective range. For these critics, critique has not only proven itself ineffective at mitigating the ideological consequences it is meant to resist, but it has also introduced into literary studies a

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[21] Notable among arguments for critique's ineffectiveness are those who point out that, whereas critique as a practice is designed to expose power dynamics, in many cases those in power no longer hide those injustices such that they warrant exposure. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick says as much in *Touching Feeling* ("while there is plenty of hidden violence that requires exposure there is also, and increasingly, an ethos where forms of violence that are hypervisible from the start may be offered as an exemplary spectacle rather than remain to be unveiled as a scandalous secret"), as does Slavoj Zizek in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (Sedgwick, 140, Zizek 29). I was startled to hear this view becoming mainstream in a 2017 episode of Buzzfeed's podcast, *See Something, Say Something*; CUNY English professor and guest of the podcast, Moustafa Bayoumi, noted in a discussion of President Trump's "temporary" Muslim travel ban (executive order 13769) that while he used to rely on Frantz Fanon and Edward Said to expose and analyze injustice, Trump's actions were so overtly unjust as to not require interpretive assistance.

widespread tendency toward negative affects and a near prohibition on positive ones. Most critics calling for a wider range of allowable affects must address the problem of paranoia: if we give up these negative affects, won't we miss something? Might not moving away from critique be socially irresponsible? In turning away from bad feelings about texts, critics tend to propose methodological solutions for allowing more positive feelings. They propose methodological changes to the way we read that allow for pleasurable experiences with texts. The idea that knowledge is pleasure, or that knowledge of all kinds warrants an 'overbalance of enjoyment,' however, does not make its way into critical conversations all that often.[22]

In pursuing the question of how negative affect has become pervasive in the field, Rita Felski asks: "Why — even as we extol multiplicity, difference, hybridity — is the affective range of criticism so limited? Why are we so hyperarticulate about our adversaries and so excruciatingly tongue-tied about our loves?" (13). Felski asks about a response to external stimuli, texts themselves.[23] How, through reading, can we articulate

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[22] Stephen Goldsmith has documented a number of critics who write under the umbrella of what he calls "critical enthusiasm," or "the deeply attractive enthusiasm—the particular feeling of engaged, dynamic urgency—that characterizes criticism as a mode of action in Blake's own work, in Blake scholarship, and in recent theoretical writings that identify the heightened affect of critical thought with the potential for genuine historical change" (2). Drawing on the work of Saree Makdisi, Susan Wolfson, and Jacques Derrida, in *Blake's Agitation*, Goldsmith asks whether such critical enthusiasm has any connection to change in the world, and in that respect, his book runs closely parallel to my argument here. However, Goldsmith's concept of "critical enthusiasm" has notable differences from the epistemological pleasure I discuss here. Most notably, Goldsmith describes critical enthusiasm as a feeling of agency (and of urgency). By Wordsworth's model, epistemological pleasure builds an epistemological climate but does not itself indicate or promise change. Goldsmith also does not address contemporary critics' concerns with what they see as a disciplinary dictate to express mostly negative affect. Goldsmith seems to see criticism as an activity that starts from critical enthusiasm and only later ends (in only some cases) in anxiety. That activity, and the picture of the world in which it happens, looks very different from the picture described by many of the critics I discuss.

[23] Perhaps this takes the point too far (of course we're concerned about texts, we're literary critics!) but one indication of the assumption that affective change in literary studies is often

what makes us feel good rather than constantly defending against what makes us feel bad, or perhaps what we make ourselves feel bad about by constantly defending against destruction? Eve Sedgwick pursues a similar path, though in different terms: she argues that the paranoia that results from ideological critique not only feels bad, but is also self-renewing: "accelerating failure to anticipate change is, moreover, as I've discussed, entirely in the nature of the paranoid process, whose sphere of influence (like that of the New Historicism itself) only expands as each unanticipated disaster seems to demonstrate more conclusively that, guess what, *you can never be paranoid enough*" (emphasis in original, *Touching* 142). In other words, each time something unexpected and bad happens, rather than proving paranoia as unhelpful (it failed to protect us from a bad surprise), it reinforces the need for that paranoia in the first place. In Sedgwick's framing, ideological critique seems to yield the kind of hypervigilance one might usually associate with a trauma response. As with trauma, the original bad event is never fully processed, and so it creates a maladaptive loop of hypervigilance and negative affect. Reparative reading, Sedgwick's alternative to paranoid reading, requires that the critic "surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader *as new*; to a reparatively positioned reader, it

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assumed to require a change in response to texts, is the frequent reliance on spatial metaphors to render proposed changes more concrete. In the blurb on the back of Rita Felski's book, one reads that "rather than looking behind a text for hidden causes and motives, literary scholars should place themselves in front of it and reflect on what it suggests and what makes it possible." The title of Heather Love's 2010 article in *NLH*, "Close, But Not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn," in which she calls for a turn away from close reading and a turn to a flatter affect in literary studies, also fits this paradigm. As Mary Thomas Crane has pointed out: "For every image that suggests a reader who, through scientific analysis or violent intervention can unmask or retrieve the deep truth hidden beneath the surface of the text, there is another image that returns to the concept of horizon and suggests that the dimensionality of the text is spun out from some central point, which may well be hollow or empty" (92).

can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise" (*Touching* 146). These two stances can't be combined, because paranoia won't allow it: "Reparative motives, once they become explicit, are inadmissible in paranoid theory both because they are about pleasure ('merely aesthetic') and because they are frankly ameliorative ('merely reformist'). What makes pleasure and amelioration so 'mere'? Only the exclusiveness of paranoia's faith in demystifying exposure" (144). In order to repair the affective state of literary studies, Sedgwick proposes a clean affective slate: we must be willing to surrender a paranoid relationship with texts in favor of one that allows for them and the world to surprise us, even when those surprises are painful ones.

While Felski and Sedgwick largely push for changes toward texts, Lisa Ruddick only partially relies on a changed relationship to texts as the starting point for changing affect in the field. In many ways, Ruddick weaves internal and external facets of criticism together. For instance, she admits that she

> sometimes think[s] that many academics of my own boomer generation, awakened as young people to the greed and violence of modern society, reacted as monks do who flee to the cloister to purge themselves of all that the world cherishes. If the capitalists valued aesthetic pleasure, we academics would take no pleasure in the beauty of the books we taught. If those in power used morality as a pretext for spreading social stigma, we would renounce the idea of the inner teacher. If the same people cherished home and family above the larger community, we would spurn home and family. The deprivation of inwardness that I have just noted in the pages of one of our journals is due partly to a poignant asceticism.

Ruddick discussion here takes on a double significance: she's talking both about critics' relationships to themselves and their relationships to the texts that they write about. In Ruddick's article more broadly, she focuses heavily on the need for the idea of a bounded self to be restored in the humanities, focusing on the "inwardness" of the individual critic, but she does not go so far as to focus on the need for a repaired relationship to knowledge itself. For Ruddick, the field must change to allow the critic the admission of selfhood, but that change doesn't focus on the critic's capacity for knowledge creation, but, as Felski put it, on that critic's "loves," including "aesthetic pleasure" and domesticity, morality, etc., portrayed therein.

One problem with focusing primarily on affective relationships to texts is that negative affect seems, at least from the portrayals of the critics I'm discussing here, to have crept into critical self-figuring, even as these critics attempt to turn us toward a more positive affective future. That is, the process of making knowledge and the state of knowing themselves have negative affect attached to them. Critics conflate a negative definition of "knowing" as being secretive about some issue or fact about the world with the definition of "knowing" that simply means having knowledge. Consider Rita Felski's description of what she calls "critical detachment,"

> not an absence of mood but one manifestation of it—a certain orientation toward one's subject, a way of making one's argument matter. It is tied to the cultivation of an intellectual persona that is highly prized in literary studies and beyond: suspicious, *knowing*, hardheaded, tirelessly vigilant. (6, my emphasis)

One of the attributes Felski gives to her jaded contemporary critic's "intellectual persona" is being "knowing." Sedgwick also uses "knowing" in her description of what critics must give up: their

"knowing, anxious paranoid determination" (*Touching* 146). Perhaps more surprising is Heather Love's argument in "Close but not Deep," in which she argues for a literary criticism that aims for knowledge (as description) that has absolutely no affect attached to it at all. She argues that a "hermeneutics of recognition and empathy . . . defines literary studies, even in an age of suspicion," urging instead production of knowledge (through description) that veers away from this hermeneutics (with all its leftover humanist baggage) and shifts from being "fat and living" to "thin and dead."

Neither Sedgwick nor Felski argue that knowledge *should* in any way be linked to negative affect, but the state of the field and the critics who inhabit seem to suggest such a connection. There are, however, models for how we rethink literature and criticism's impacts on the world by starting with the question of the critic's orientation toward knowledge. What we get when we turn back to Wordsworth's Preface is not a guidebook for contemporary criticism, but a potential model for affective change in the field. The Preface allows us to imagine the possibility of conducting ideological and social critique while experiencing the pleasure of our own faculties working to create new knowledge. These two positions might seem incompatible insofar as the pleasure of knowledge creation might seem to depend upon constructing the critic as a liberal subject whose "private life, mental or domestic, is felt to provide constant inarguable evidence of his constitutive 'freedom'" (Miller, qtd in Hale). Certainly this is how Wordsworth conjures the poet, a figure who manages to remain free of the impacts of social formations and

"ideological delusion" for long enough to write literature that might heal his readers from the impacts of those very social formations and ideological delusions. If it has been the work of literary criticism, more particularly in the tradition of ideological critique, to "show that the 'free play of moral imagination' is anything but free: it is an agent of regulation, discipline, instrumentality, and ideological delusion," then Wordsworth's celebration of the liberal imagination of the poet cannot be compatible with contemporary ideological and social critique without meaningful adjustment (Hale 897). But in spite of the fact that literary critics engaged in critique remain cognizant of the fact that they can never truly stand outside of the systems they write in resistance to, there continues to be faith that methodological and linguistic capability, the skills one learns through sustained academic literary study, have the power to effect resistance. Whether or not the cognitive capabilities, skills, and tools we learn in the process of becoming experts are effective (and how). I am most concerned here not with their results, but with the texture and feeling that comes with their use: engagement, immersion, capability, investment, creativity, are all part of the pleasure of knowledge, and all come into play when we are able to meaningfully invest time in developing our critical capacities through the practice of writing criticism.

To repeat Thomas Pfau's characterization: for Wordsworth, "emotion or feeling relates to thought the way climate relates to local weather conditions." We may or may not be willing to sign on to this idea, but it's hard to imagine that repairing affective relationships with texts can happen without first repairing our affective relationships to knowledge and our ability to produce it: to making and makeability. If we characterize critique as the critics I have been discussing characterize it, we might well understand it

as a game in which we play constant affective defense; yes, we produce knowledge of our own, but our emotional responses to that knowledge, and often the knowledge itself, are often produced in the service of defending against the problems we see in the world. A critic in today's political climate could do worse than play affective offense by adopting the baseline assumption that one should rejoice in the very form of literary knowledge, that we should all work toward epistemological pleasure.

Janeites, Critics, and the Contradictions of Nostalgia

I am a Jane-Austenite, and therefore slightly imbecile about Jane Austen . . . I read and re-read, the mouth open and the mind closed - E. M. Forster (Brodie 54)

The longing for human wholeness, for lives not blighted by isolation and alienation, for a green earth: these are the ordinary aspirations that define the limits of modernity and the nature of our loss. In acknowledging nostalgia we also acknowledge hope - Alastair Bonnett (173)

In Lisa Ruddick's essay, "When Nothing is Cool," she argues that literary studies has been overrun by theoretical approaches that cause bad feelings—that "burn through whatever is small, tender, and worthy of protection and cultivation." One of the most compelling moments of Ruddick's essay is when she articulates, clearly and forcefully, a progressive tendency commonly manifested in literature departments: the tendency to conflate bad feelings with a sense of personal and political responsibility, and thus to throw the baby out with the bathwater:

> I sometimes think that many academics of my own boomer generation, awakened as young people to the greed and violence of modern society, reacted as monks do who flee to the cloister to purge themselves of all that the world cherishes. If the capitalists valued aesthetic pleasure, we academics would take no pleasure in the beauty of the books we taught. If those in power used morality as a pretext for spreading social stigma, we would renounce the idea of the inner teacher. If the same people cherished home and family above the larger community, we would spurn home and family. The deprivation of inwardness that I have just noted in the pages of [*English Literary History*] is due partly to a poignant asceticism.

In their zeal to reject the injustices that have resulted from the unequal distribution of power in a rapidly globalizing capitalist economic system, scholars have conflated the rhetorical tools by which those in power maintain that power (by appealing to aesthetic pleasure, morality, etc.) with the things that rhetoric appeals to. That is, these once-cherished aspects of human existence are often responded to with the kinds of bad feelings that should be reserved for the injustices that have been perpetrated in their names. So too, does pleasure get conflated with complicity, and thus literary critics turn to negative affects like suspicion, or even "cruelty," as discomfiting but more trustworthy critical states.

In this chapter I'd like to make a case study of this tendency in the form of the often contentious relationship between literary critics and lay readers of Jane Austen, the contentiousness of which has been ongoing at least since Henry James grumped about the consumer model of literature that Austen's work came to embody at the end of the nineteenth century. In James's eyes, "produced by readers deemed incapable of assessing Austen's just value or discriminating her real merits, Janeism was a purely commercial affair and as such distinct from serious criticism. Until quite recently, few literary critics challenged James's contempt"(*Cults* 68). In addition to their continuing consumption of mugs, enamel pins, votary candles, and tote bags (along with a litany of other such sins), lay readers of Austen have often (in the eyes of critics at least) been guilty of harboring nostalgia for the supposed simplicity of the Regency period and the kinds of love stories made possible within it. While some critics, especially in recent years, do welcome Janeite enthusiasm for Austen and her time—nostalgia included—there is also a tradition, in line with the broader literary-critical tendencies described by Ruddick, of dismissing

Janeites as unsophisticated and even politically troubling. In this chapter I'd like to continue the conversation about critical and Janeite reading practices; I argue that broadly tsk-tsk-ing Austen-related nostalgia relies on a kneejerk reaction against nostalgic feeling (and pleasurable feelings more generally) and an underestimation of the complexity of nostalgia as an affective state. I take Janeites as a case study, then, not primarily to save them from big mean critics (although I do some of that), but rather because their reading practices, and the affective motivations for those practices, embody some of the taboos about pleasure that Ruddick identifies and that I'd like to investigate further. Nostalgia has often been considered as part and parcel with a reactionary politics that longs for and even idealizes a less inclusive and injurious past. But though, as Ruddick has argued, some literary critics tend to think of pleasure and complicity as inevitably linked, this need not be the case when it comes to the pleasure of nostalgia and complicity in reactionary positions and the injuries they perpetuate. Furthermore, to consider nostalgia as inherently dangerous is to too readily subscribe to the notion that nostalgia is an inherently conservative response to a progressing world given that, in fact, the left has its own history with nostalgia and that nostalgia can sometimes be used as a tool for progressive action.[24] Restructuring our relationship with nostalgia would of course be difficult, and in fact it might be difficult to "underestimate how hard it is to rethink a topic that has for so long, as Christopher Lasch notes, been a 'political offence of the first order'" (Bonnett 2). But a reconsideration of nostalgia allows for new political

[24] I consider the rejection of nostalgia as a reactionary conservative political position to be of a piece with a trend I identify in an earlier chapter of this dissertation: that of literary critics making sure, in the course of their methodological interventions, to demonstrate that their methods are unlike those of the "pre-enlightened" days of schools like New Criticism that fail to address literature's relationship to history, particularly in terms of the systemic inequalities perpetuated by and within capitalist economic systems.

possibilities, and, most importantly within literary studies, new interpretive possibilities too.

Longing for Jane

The tension that underlies Ruddick's article can be figured as a tension between pleasure and responsibility within literary studies, but it's also worthwhile to highlight the degree to which literary studies attempts to straddle the divide between public and private life. Many lay readers would consider reading a novel (most relevant with Austen as our case study) to be a private, personal activity rather than a public, much less a political, action. Many literary critics, on the other hand, understand reading and interpreting a novel as at least potentially public in nature, particularly in a field in which New Historicism's insistence on the dynamic nature of discourse and the fuzzy boundaries between private and public, aesthetic object and commodity, has enjoyed a large share of the critical market, backed up by other theoretical approaches handed down from the heyday of theory in the 1980s that also insist on the political nature of aesthetic works.

If to read is to participate in public life, then E. M. Forster's tongue-in-cheek statement—all-too-familiar to literary critics with knowledge of Austen's reception history—that being a "Jane-Austenite" makes him "slightly imbecile," a man who reads her novels with "the mouth open and the mind closed," might leave some critics feeling concerned—not about Forster so much as the Janeites he echoes. Forster—who, thank heavens, at least has the decency to use Austen's last name instead of just calling her "Jane"!—calls to mind the ongoing tendency to characterize amateur readers of Jane Austen as insipid, unserious, nostalgic, or one of a host of other potential slights:

> In much the same way that trekkies, fans, and mass culture media enthusiasts of today are, as Henry Jenkins has shown, marginalized by dominant cultural institutions, Janeites constitute a reading community whose practices violate a range of protocols later instituted by professional academics when novel studies emerged—dogmas holding, for example, that you cannot talk about characters as if they were real people; that reading novels requires specialist skills and knowledge developed at universities; that hermeneutic mastery, as exemplified in a comprehensive 'reading,' is the objective of legitimate novel criticism; that the courtship plot celebrating marriage and maturity is the determinative event in Austen's fiction; and that the business of reading novels is solitary rather than sociable.[25] ("Divine" 30-31)

Continuing her documentation of how uncomfortable critics are made by the supposed excesses of Janeites, Claudia Johnson points out in *Jane Austen's Cults and Cultures* that there is perhaps an issue of pride at play that impacts critics' responses to JASNA masked balls and the like: "Most of these activities can seem trivial, unprofessional, and even chastening to academic scholars—how mortifying to encounter one's own earth-

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[25] Johnson here argues that the literary-critical position on reading is one that is "solitary rather than sociable," which might seem to reverse my argument that lay readers consider reading to be private rather than public. I do not, however, consider "solitary" and "private" to be synonyms in this case: in fact, although many Janeite events are public events, I suspect that many Janeites would consider their reading of Austen intimate and personal rather than public and political (except insofar as there's a sort of mini-politics that has developed between camps of Janeites). As I use the distinction, book clubs and other aspects of sociability associated with Austen fandom can still constitute personal, private experiences rather than public, political ones. Some Janeites take this differentiation further than others, including those "antiacademic readers of today who bitterly complain that we 'read into' Jane Austen's novels, designed for pure entertainment, all manner of weighty moral, social, or political significance" (*Cults* 102).

shattering essay on Austen printed alongside a recipe for white soup, as somehow equivalent exercises" (11).[26] Deidre Lynch echoes this, suggesting that critical anxiety about Janeites might derive from a larger professional anxiety, "a worry that Austen has been afflicted by the wrong sort of popularity" that seems to amplify "the tenuousness of the boundaries between elite and popular culture, and between the canonical and the noncanonical" ("Sharing" 8).

But discomfort with Austen fandom runs deeper than the mere breaking of the rules that critics have laid down for literary studies. After all, as Lynch also points out, rarely do we find the same levels of discomfort when it comes to fans of other canonical authors:

> Shakespeare fans, we should note, can act like fans, parade through Stratford-upon-Avon every April 23rd sporting sprigs of rosemary, and not put at risk the plays' claims to be taken seriously. No one, it seems, feels compelled to take this cult audience to task for their excesses and their failure to blush over them. But numerous readers of Austen have enlisted her in projects of cultural intimidation and regulation, making her into the knuckle-rapping schoolmistress of English letters. The novels are not simply *safe* reading, then, but in this guise a kind of boot camp. The roles Austen has been assigned often involve her teaching the reader and/or would-be writer a lesson, about morality, about linguistic propriety,

[26] And, in fact, earlier writing by Johnson, like "The Divine Miss Jane," which I cite below, reflects the same suspicions about Janeites that she documents in *Jane Austen's Cults and Cultures*.

> or even about the renunciation of literary ambition. *She* chooses her words carefully. *She* knows her place. ("Sharing" 10)

If, as Lynch suggests, we often assign Austen roles that "involve her teaching the reader and/or would-be writer a lesson,"[27] then all the more reason to respond with disdain to Janeites who seem stubbornly to refuse that lesson. Shakespeare doesn't whip his audience into shape, and so that audience has an excuse for its antics, whereas Austen, the implicit (and sometimes explicit) argument goes, gives her readers everything they need to read the right way. Given that a large majority of Janeites are women and Austen's gender has been a majorly important component of her reception history, we might think of this as a critical desire to exact the kind of discipline upon readers (as opposed to characters) that Eve Sedgwick identifies in "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl."

What kind of nostalgia is it that these readers seem to need disciplining for? Anything approaching a full history of the sources of Janeite nostalgia is impossible in the space of a dissertation chapter. Moreover, a number of excellent reception histories of Austen have been produced in recent years,[28] enough to solidify these histories into their own micro-genre complete with a greatest hits of reception, including, but certainly not limited to, Henry James's crankiness at the commodification of Austen's work; Constance Hill's "desire to be [Austen's] friend" (a now very familiar feeling) in *Jane*

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[27] See Eve Sedgwick on Austen criticism's "unresting exaction of the spectacle of a Girl Being Taught a Lesson," which I discuss further below—for "the vengefulness it vents on the heroines whom it purports to love, and whom, perhaps, it does" ("Jane" 833). Sedgwick also argues that this spectacle is sometimes focused toward Austen herself (834).

[28] See Claudia Johnson's *Jane Austen's Cults and Cultures*, Devoney Looser's *The Making of Jane Austen*, and Kathryn Sutherland's *Jane Austen's Textual Lives*, three excellent recent examples of Austen reception history.

Austen: Her Homes and Her Friends; Rudyard Kipling's representation of Austen in the trenches of WWI in "The Janeites"; and D. W. Harding's disdain for whole swaths of Janeites in "Regulated Hatred" (*Cults* 70). To greatly reduce the complexity of Austen's reception, then: I will frame Janeite nostalgia as running along two parallel lines: longing for Jane Austen and longing for the supposed simplicity of Regency England.

Most notably, perhaps, Janeite nostalgia manifests itself in a longing for the person of Jane Austen herself. Janeites (and at times critics) often desire intimacy with Austen; there is a frequently voiced desire for her friendship and other sorts of familiarity ("Aunt Jane" comes to mind as an epithet).[29] This desire for intimacy with Austen derives from at least the end of the Victorian period, which saw the "sometimes quietly burbling and sometimes expansively gushing effusions of enthusiasm for Jane Austen" that Henry James deemed "twaddle" (*Cults* 68). Claudia Johnson reports that in 1902, Constance Hill in *Jane Austen and Her Friends* (in which Hill and her sister travel to a number of Austen-related sites) treats Austen in this way, desiring something beyond an everyday kind of friendship to blossom through the trip: "Our journey is, to be sure, an act of friendship, for to know Jane Austen [. . .] is to desire to be her friend. As is so often the case throughout this little volume, we also cross boundaries into the noumenal: Jane Austen is no ordinary friend, and the purpose is not simply to get to become acquainted with her in any ordinary sense; rather, it is to 'hold communion sweet' with her 'mind and heart'" (*Cults* 71). She wishes for more than simple friendship: aided by the

[29] A common enough way of referring to Austen around the turn of the century, when much of the available biographical material on her, particularly given the dearth of letters, were biographies written by family members.

historical sites that Austen once knew, Hill desires a kind of union with the imagined presence of Austen.

The desire for intimacy with Austen has continued into the present, sometimes even creating bonds between Janeites who share this desire, who "came increasingly to resemble an extended family circle with all of the affection and exclusivity implied therein" (Brodie 55). The desire for friendship with Austen is shared widely enough among members of groups like the Jane Austen Society of North America that one member thought of turning away from the term "Janeite" and toward "friends of Jane Austen":

> Searching for a more accurate term than 'Janeite' to describe her fellow fans, one member of JASNA characterized their relation to Austen as follows: 'How about 'friends of Jane Austen'? I've always thought of her that way. I read her when I'm sick, or feeling sorry for myself. I read her when I'm trying to understand people, or the way the world is. Jane Austen *is* like a friend. I think I can truly say that I am a friend of Jane's.' (Brodie 55)

This reader reacts to Austen's work with a fantasy of reciprocity between herself and Austen, a pleasant fantasy that perhaps draws on the fact that we have so few of Austen's things from which to draw conclusions about her (her literary work, a handful of letters, and a few historic sites). Perhaps it also draws on a combination of something in the texts and something in us that allows us to feel less isolated (the Janeite quoted above articulates a series of isolating experiences: illness, emotional pain, and the alienation from people and the world that leads to difficult attempts at understanding, all of which

Austen is able to save her from) as we read Austen's novels, even to the point where we might indulge in a fantasy of reciprocity where there is none.

While "Jane," as many are wont to call her, is perhaps most hopelessly, recurrently longed for, there has been and remains a high degree of nostalgia for the Regency period that comes along with Austen fandom. Claire Harman points out that this nostalgia began early, as soon as the 1820's, when writers of "silver fork" and "dandy" novels began producing "fantasy literature for the Age of Reform, inventing a version of Regency England, its lost elegance and comforting social inequalities, around which readers could manufacture a little nostalgia" (94). Skipping forward, R. W. Chapman's edition of Austen's novels in 1923 continues this Regency nostalgia,[30] as his notes tend to remove "Austen from her particular life story and [attach] her to the age she lived in - specifically its genteeler aspects" (Harman 197). Chapman's annotations are, as Claudia Johnson notes, rather sparse, but in the cases in which he does annotate, "his choices clearly suppress as much as they reveal. Chapman is doing more than preserving Jane Austen's texts; he is preserving a sense of stability and loveliness of Jane Austen's time so that it may remain there, accessible for him and his like-minded contemporaries when modernity becomes too harsh, as it already has" (*Cults* 123). Chapman seems to find what he seeks in his research into, and presentation of, Regency England:

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[30] While I cut off my account of nostalgia for the Regency period with Chapman's work in 1923 (which impacts Regency nostalgia up to the present given its longevity), this nostalgia continues through the 20th- and into the 21st-century, with a particularly notable example being Lord David Cecil's *A Portrait of Jane Austen*. In his biography, Cecil displays a particularly privileged version of period nostalgia as he "link[s] Austen firmly with genteel, 'smiling' southern landscapes [and] the most attractive aspects of Regency decor and architecture, praising Chippendale and Sheraton chairs, Wedgwood and Worcester cups, not because there is any evidence that Jane Austen ever sat on one or raised the other to her lips, but as examples of the 'peculiar amenity' of life at the time, 'provided one was born English and in sufficiently easy circumstances'" (Harman 230-31).

> To Chapman, Jane Austen is in the canon not because of her social vision or her artistry, but because she had the good fortune to be able and the good taste to be willing to record the elegant manners of her time. Hence with inexorable circularity, Chapman's edition of Austen creates the author it presumes, and the history it desires, a graceful monument to country life in Regency England, inveterately given to graciousness and tranquility. (196)

Writing in 2005, before the publication of the Cambridge edition of Austen's works, Kathryn Sutherland pointed out that Chapman's edition was still the definitive scholarly edition of Austen, and that that fact necessarily impacted the kinds of interpretations available to us: "as long as Chapman's text remains the source of our critical readings, however contemporizing or canon exploding we think them, they will wear the contradictory mark of this legacy" (23). Chapman's edition harbors a certain kind of nostalgia that shaped much of the scholarship available before the Cambridge editions were published and for that reason continues to influence scholarship now. Chapman baked nostalgia right into his textual apparatus, and though our reliance upon that apparatus might have dissipated in recent years, its influence set the trajectory of Austen reception for a number of decades, pushing readers toward an idealized understanding of Austen and her period.

As I began to articulate above, this Janeite nostalgia has elicited its share of criticism. Though of course no single source can be fully responsible for this, part of the disdain and sense of haughty authority later academics have in relation to Janeites almost certainly stems from D. W. Harding's "Regulated Hatred," which Claudia Johnson says

"had the effect of wresting cultural authority away from largely upper-class men and women of letters and to legitimate a newer and middle-class professoriate who saw themselves and Austen alike as dissenters" (*Cults* 149). Although the Janeites to whom Harding responds are of a narrow, elite social class as opposed to the more varied social status of Austen fans now, the relationship between critics and Janeites may still be described as a relationship between readers from the political mainstream and critics who not only tend much further left than the average citizen, but who often see their jobs as entailing social critique of that mainstream.

In recent years, though, more critics have attempted to shift their assessments of Janeites. Nicholas Dames, dealing with the battle over nostalgia in particular, points out a critical trend of attempting to save Austen from Janeites (and perhaps to save Janeites from themselves): "It is as if nostalgia is an affliction to which Austen's readers are particularly susceptible, for which only the inoculations of a radically denostalgizing criticism are a cure" (120). If, as some critics may fear, lay readers are "particularly susceptible" to nostalgic readings of Austen's novels, then it is up to critics to work against that nostalgia, administering anti-nostalgic "inoculations" designed to prevent the spread of such troublesome readings.[31] But rather than taking the bait and characterizing lay readers as pesky nostalgics who can't take Austen for the sometimes dark, often ironic novelist she is, Dames reconfigures the role of nostalgia in Austen, instead arguing that Austen's work evolves in its relationship to nostalgia:

[31] This is, of course, an oversimplification of the history of Austen reception. Critical response to Janeites has been mixed; Lionel Trilling, for one, worried over the impact that the academy's newfound interest in Austen might have on lay readers, reversing the usual pattern of concern (Brodie, 57).

> Nostalgic remembrance begins in Austen, with *Sense and Sensibility*, as the object of representation; by the time of *Persuasion* it has become a principle of representation, so thoroughly embedded into her narrative practice that readers learn, perhaps, their nostalgia from these later texts—the very nostalgia that serves to mobilize the modern Austen critic. (121)

Janeite lay readers, on Dames's account, are not susceptible to nostalgia so much as they are compelled to it—particularly in her later novels—by the fact that Austen has begun to use it as "a principle" rather than "an object" of representation. That is, her later novels have nostalgia embedded within their very form.

Relevant to Dames's argument is the fact that nostalgia has undergone a significant shift in definition over time: what was first classified as a medical malady experienced mainly by soldiers and sailors longing for their homelands—"a wasting illness, one with its own etiology, symptoms, and set of cures"—later becomes "a regular fact of human memory," taking on a depathologized, more general meaning of longing for an inaccessible past (Dames 119). That shift in definition began around the time Austen was writing and revising her novels, "during the first few decades of the nineteenth century" (119). Dames claims that this changing definition of nostalgia plays itself out in Austen's novels, starting with *Sense and Sensibility*, in which Marianne's nostalgia for Norland Park is very much pathologized, functioning as a physical illness that is "highly dangerous, as dramatic in its eventual effects upon Marianne's body as any of the case studies discussed by eighteenth-century physicians" (119). Beginning with *Pride and Prejudice* and continuing through her later work until its culmination in *Persuasion*, nostalgia takes on a meaning more familiar to readers now. Whereas,

> the nostalgia of place is fixated on a place that does not lose but instead gains power when distant; the nostalgia of Austen, like our nostalgia, desires a time that has already disappeared—and insofar as this nostalgia knows that it desires what cannot be regained, its desire does not harden into mental disturbance, and it cannot therefore be captured in the return-or-die conflict. (128)

Not only has nostalgia become depathologized, but Dames also figures it as future-oriented. That is, in Austen's later three novels in particular, especially in *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*, nostalgia provides characters with a way to neutralize past difficulties and even traumas and move forward.

This is true, for example, of Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*; Anne embodies Dames's "modern nostalgia" in her newfound mobility throughout *Persuasion*. The narrative of *Persuasion* sets up a contrast between Anne's life before the start of the narrative—she has been living a static life at Kellynch Hall—and her relatively mobile life after. In the crucial scene in which Captain Harville asserts that men love longest, Anne appeals to mobility as a type of freedom from dark feelings, claiming that mobility allows one "continual preoccupation" that lets memory and negative emotions fade; women's immobility is therefore emotionally confining. Austen here "shift[s] from one form of selfhood—the naval memory of Banks's homesick sailors, the unassimilable self—to another form, which finds in mobility a rescue from the confinements of remembrance" (137). This shift enables a parallel shift, "the initial phases of which are visible in Austen's fiction, from an older medical nostalgia to the newer nostalgia that will be its cure" (137). By the end of *Persuasion* we understand this to be true in the very form of the novel, as a

> leavetaking of home spurs a series of further leavetakings; a trauma rooted in the memory is ameliorated, judged and left behind; former mistakes are canceled, former times periodized and then ended, stopped with a mental period; and what is left is a capacity for communalized retrospect . . . 'Novelty' over trauma, 'every fresh place' over regret: a vision of a mobile consciousness fulfills the preference for pleasure over pain that Elizabeth Bennett had previously advised. (137)

For Austen, Dames argues, the pain of nostalgia as pathology—as genuine physical and emotional ailment—gets replaced by the pleasure of a new type of nostalgia, one that uses mobility to process past emotional distress and allow for the past to be remembered with pleasure, even when pleasure is not the emotional register of the memory's content. Mobility works to create distance between characters and the past, literally and figuratively allowing them to move forward.

Not only does Austen shift the type of nostalgia that her characters (and presumably readers) experience, but she also shifts the form of her novels "so that complicity in Austen's narrative logic involves a complicity in the logic of nostalgia as well. We are asked, that is, to see the past as ended, periodized, disconnected, memorable only in the nostalgic registers" (130). Take, for example, the scene in *Pride and Prejudice* in which both Elizabeth and Darcy admit their past follies. Dames uses Darcy as his example:

> as we have seen, pleasurable retrospect is tied to the inexplicit, Darcy's avoidance here of particular memories—at the very moment when his remorse might be expected to issue an apology for a specific action or turn of phrase—is a triumphant act of nostalgic remembrance. It is a modern nostalgia in spite of its

> manifestly regretful tone, for it is not only vague but also crucially *disconnected* from the past it relates. (129)

Darcy's embrace of nostalgic remembrance is foisted on the reader of *Pride and Prejudice*, who understands nostalgia's value in moving the plot forward. Further, and more importantly, Austen's technique is to force her reader to participate in nostalgia by referring, at the end of the novel, to a past to which we don't have access (in this case Darcy's childhood), and so "It is the beginning of a nostalgic readerliness, a method in which our textual recollections in all their specificity . . . are supplanted at the text's end by a new, rather more mystified past" (130).[32] By withholding from the reader the very events to which Darcy chooses not to refer, Austen requires that the reader's continued movement through her narrative (given that Darcy's expressed regret is necessary to demonstrate his reformation and allow for him and Elizabeth to fully reconcile) involves participation in Darcy's nostalgic remembrance.

I have followed Dames's argument at such length because my goal in this chapter is to take a relatively flat conception of nostalgia as a political and interpretive impediment and turn it over to show other dimensions. Dames does this quite thoroughly, reorienting our approach to Janeites by attributing some of the response her readers have to her novels to the form of those novels. Dames's formalist-historicist hybrid approach compellingly accounts for Janeite readings even as it meaningfully reinterprets Austen's work and the idea of nostalgia. Not always a reaction to textual elements, nostalgia can be constituted within the text, and Austen has masterfully made it so in her later works. Dames's historicized reconsideration of Janeite nostalgia in terms of Austen's uses of it

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[32] Again, Dames suggests problems with nostalgia by articulating it not merely as a longing for a lost past or fantasy of the past, but as a type of "bad memory" as Alastair Bonnett phrases it.

as a narrative device affords lay readers a modicum of respect by shifting the blame for nostalgia away from them and onto Austen herself. Austen cannot truly be blamed for this nostalgia given that, at the time she wrote, nostalgia had not yet taken on its negative associations and given that she uses nostalgia as an effective tool for creating relative psychological health in her characters.[33] What Dames does is demonstrate how Austen's work tracks and engages with changing definitions of nostalgia and save Janeites from the charge of participating in that nostalgia willy-nilly. What he does not do, however, is rethink our understanding of nostalgia and its appropriateness to quality literary criticism. Using language like "complicity" and "mystified past," Dames gestures towards the assumption of nostalgia as being incompatible with good scholarship and social responsibility in our contemporary context.

Dames is not the only critic in recent years to shift away from an adversarial relationship with non-academic Jane Austen fans. In many cases, this shift in Janeite-critic relations is framed as a move away from elitism or as an opportunity to add yet another tidbit to the already ample, continually growing composite history of Austen reception. Claudia Johnson, for example, argues that we ought to respect "the intelligence and the dignity of their commentary on Austen, [because] even when—indeed precisely when—it seems vacuous, uselessly antique, and undisciplined to us, we are able to turn back to the novels themselves and find them reenriched by their own literary history"

[33] Svetlana Boym notes the shift away from patriotic connotations of nostalgia that suggested a healthy love of home and country: "Despite the fact that by the end of the nineteenth century nostalgia was pervading both the public and private spheres, the word itself was acquiring negative connotations" (15).

(*Cults* 15).[34] Johnson invokes both of the reasons I've given above; similarly, Laura Fairchild Brodie encourages scholars to look closely at reception from amateur readers from Jane Austen's time because:

> Fragmentary and repetitive as they are, these readers' comments offer Austen scholars several opportunities: to reclaim the voice of the female amateur in Austen's early reception; to reconsider the family-circle model of response still current among today's Janeites; and to apply a renewed vision of Austen's contemporary audience to our understanding of her novels. (69)

Although Brodie's argument for lay-reader value in reception histories is notably more nuanced than Johnson's, neither she nor Johnson meaningfully recuperate any of the activities or cognitive-affective orientations toward Austen attributed to Janeites. Still, Johnson, Brodie, and Dames are not alone in their shift away from an adversarial relationship with Janeites; in recent years such critics as Kathryn Sutherland, Devoney Looser, and Linda Troost, among others, have shifted toward an amicable, non-adversarial relationship with Janeites—one in which JASNA balls and other Janeite festivities are no longer off limits to scholars who want to continue being taken seriously.[35]

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[34] While Johnson pushes for greater respect to be paid to Janeites, I find the above quotation a bit mystifying insofar as she argues for the dignity and intelligence of readers whose readings we find "vacuous, uselessly antique, and undisciplined," and for the value of such contributions to the project of building a more thorough account of Austen's reception history. This strikes me as the type of accumulative logic that Brian Connolly has helpfully critiqued in "Against Accumulation," and which I discuss in my chapter on *Sartor Resartus*.

[35] Laura Fairchild Brodie gives a bit more respect to Janeites than Claudia Johnson by discussing them as equals alongside Austen scholars: "While the Janeites have always included professional reviewers and academics, equally prevalent among their ranks are scores of lay readers —

By re-examining nostalgia and its implications, I hope to put this newfound goodwill and fun to use to argue for a movement beyond tolerance and toward value: nostalgia—more associated with Janeite reading than with academic criticism—can be not only tolerable and fun, but also, at times, valuable. Reconsidering the relationship between Janeites and critics can go beyond merely arguing against the elitism of critics and for the vaguely defined value of Janeite participation in, and creation of, Austen culture. Rather, our reactions to Janeite reading remind us of our own operating principles, encouraging us to re-examine their value and reframe categories, like nostalgia, that shape our discussions of Janeite reading. I have included such a lengthy summary of Dames's argument for this reason, but Dames doesn't address the fact that much of Janeite nostalgia is not strictly formal; much is focused on Austen herself and the time in which she lived, and it is not always so carefully considered as Austen's formulation of the nostalgia that she embeds within her narratives. In other words, Dames, along with the critics I've cited in the previous paragraph, doesn't go far enough in reexamining the reasoning behind some critical responses to Janeites.

Nostalgia's Commitments

As I noted above in my account of Dames's arguments, nostalgia has changed meaning significantly over time. First classified as pathology—a medical condition affecting soldiers and sailors—, during the early nineteenth century nostalgia began a shift toward its modern definition of longing for an inaccessible past, though it hadn't yet taken on its negative connotations (Dames 119). Over the last two centuries nostalgia has

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amateur fans whose opinions have enlivened Austen debate and whose poems and personal testimonials currently coexist with more 'scholarly' articles in the pages of *Persuasions*" (57).

continued to develop, and for the purposes of this chapter I'll largely rely on Svetlana Boym's broad but helpful version: "Nostalgia (from *nostos*—return home, and *algia*—longing) is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy" (xiii). Nostalgia can be a longing for a "home that no longer exists" and "a romance with one's own fantasy" because while one can nostalgically long for a time or place from one's own life, it often fixates on a time or place that we haven't directly experienced, as is the case with Austen nostalgia. This definition also acknowledges that nostalgia for the past is often fantasy; it relies on an understanding of a time or place that has been idealized. Boym considers nostalgia not necessarily as a failing, but rather as an inevitability given the conditions of modernity; she identifies a "global epidemic of nostalgia, an affective yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world," and argues that "Nostalgia inevitably reappears as a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals. [It] is coeval with modernity itself" (xiv). As I'll address later, while Boym does acknowledge the inevitability of nostalgia, she doesn't think that all nostalgia is created equal, and she carefully articulates a difference between ways of experiencing and politically utilizing nostalgia.

Nostalgia is frequently and rightfully associated with troubling political positions. Donald Trump's slogan, "Make America Great Again," is the most obvious recent catchphrase of this kind of nostalgia. Samuel Earle, writing for *Jacobin*, has named support for Donald Trump and the international rise of the far right, "a nostalgic fervor for a proud past, coupled with a hostility toward 'outsiders.' Imaginations of this past

differ depending on the nation but, ultimately, they amount to the same thing: a phantom homeland with a strong sense of belonging." Earle figures this politics of nostalgia as a politics of exclusion—white supremacist exclusion, for example—a reactionary backlash against identity politics that runs on the logic that "to turn back the clock, others must be turned out."

But though Earle is right to point out the deeply nostalgic ideological positions held by many on the right, it does not follow that nostalgia doesn't also exist on the left, or that the solution to such toxic policies and positions is to respond negatively to all nostalgia.[36] As Ruddick has suggested, it's not only nostalgia that results in a yolking together of goodness and pain. Wendy Brown, writing more than twenty years ago, pointed out an important problem of treating identity politics as liberatory. For Brown, identity politics is organized around injury, an embodiment of Nietzsche's concept of *ressentiment*: "Politicized identity […] enunciates itself, makes claims for itself, only by entrenching, restating, dramatizing and inscribing its pain in politics; it can hold out no future—for itself or others—that triumphs over this pain" (74). Discussing how the left might remedy the problem of identity "inscribing its pain in politics," Brown considers Nietzsche's encouragement (in the face of what he calls *ressentiment*) of "forgetting" past injury as one possible solution, but ultimately rejects it, acknowledging that "if identity structured in part by *ressentiment* resubjugates itself through its investment in its own pain, through its refusal to make itself in the present, memory is the house of this activity and this refusal," but refusing Nietzsche's admonition to forget on account of the fact that

[36] In fact, it calls to mind the passage from Lisa Ruddick's article that I cited earlier in which she argues that literary critics renounce what gives them pleasure the moment those who misuse power touch it.

"erased histories and historical invisibility are themselves such integral elements of the pain inscribed in most subjugated identities [, that] the counsel of forgetting, at least in its unreconstructed Nietzschean form, seem inappropriate if not cruel" (74). Brown's proposed solution seems to be to skip over the problem of the present, a movement from the language of "being" to a language of "wanting," a turn from the relation of past to present to a relation of past to future. This shift, without erasing a history of injury, moves the focus away from that history by disallowing the kinds of statements that make political identity and past injury seem synonymous and allowing for a positive orientation toward the future. Notably, for readers intent on advancing social justice, it also offers a way out of the difficulty of decoupling bad feelings and good politics. While Brown doesn't advocate nostalgia and even criticizes those on the left who use it as a means to reject identity politics, she also pushes for a more thoughtful response to reactionary nostalgia than a politics of injury, doing so by demonstrating that goodness and pain need not be inextricably linked, and thus opening the door for a reconsideration of the relationship between pleasure and responsibility.

Theorists have followed Brown's lead,[37] at least as far as decoupling pleasure and complicity goes, and begun to work on the problem of nostalgia as complicity, something that Alastair Bonnett identifies as a long-held assumption on the left. Bonnett adds the distinction between the personal and the political realms in terms of the left's tolerance of nostalgia: while many might allow for nostalgia in "the realm of cultural practice, of personal pleasures, of our flight to the comforts of home or holiday," in which "it is

[37] I hesitate to use this phrase, since Brown herself rejects nostalgia in the chapter that I'm pulling from, but I introduce reconsiderations of nostalgia in this way to highlight their shared goal of disentangling responsibility and goodness from pain.

ubiquitous and explicit," "within the realm of political rhetoric, of intellectual activity, of public life, nostalgia is routinely vilified. Indeed a willingness to scorn it remains a ready symbol of progressive inclinations and hard-headed vigour" (5). Bonnett writes generally about the political left in Britain, but Svetlana Boym's account of nostalgia is much broader, including artists and others concerned not only with justice, but also aesthetics:

> the more nostalgia there is, the more heatedly it is denied. Nostalgia is something of a bad word, an affectionate insult at best. 'Nostalgia is to memory as kitsch is to art,' writes Charles Maier. The word *nostalgia* is frequently used dismissively. 'Nostalgia . . . is essentially history without guilt. Heritage is something that suffuses us with pride rather than with shame,' writes Michael Kammen. Nostalgia in this sense is an abdication of personal responsibility, a guilt-free homecoming, an ethical and aesthetic failure. (xiv)

Notably, Boym points out the connection between bad feelings, like guilt and shame, and supposed goodness. A refusal of "guilt" in this model is an "abdication of personal responsibility" or a "failure."

While Bonnett and Boym survey the history of nostalgia from above, pointing out a progressive history of rejecting nostalgia, Michael Kaplan provides an example from Marxist literary criticism—representative of reactions from critics more broadly—of the knee-jerk response to nostalgia that assumes a connection between being guilt-free and being complicit. Forward movement for Marxist critique, Kaplan argues, will require "confronting the nostalgic impulse animating the ultimately reassuring narrative of a lost fiction" (267). In Kaplan's essay, he assumes nostalgia to be always, inevitably problematic, articulating his thesis based on the assumption that "the nostalgic impulse"

drags back progress. Given the tendency, documented elsewhere in this dissertation, for literary criticism to insist that theories and methods be compatible with, if not outright encouraging of, left political positions, this link between nostalgia and reactionary politics would seem to throw a bit of a wrench into the desire to change the nature of critical engagement with Janeites.

Part of the work of disentangling nostalgia and complicity is recognizing its constant presence across political and intellectual spectra. Alastair Bonnett fleshes out this history, paying attention not only to "recent re-evaluations of nostalgia that suggest that its critical and reflexive forms can be sifted out and welcomed as progressive," but also the longer history of "the modern, ostensibly anti-nostalgic, left [within which] there exists a profound sense of loss," arguing that nostalgia is "constitutive and inescapable [in] nature," and that "such yearnings are not a cancerous or alien intrusion but integral to the radical imagination" (3).[38] Bonnett points out that, given the conditions of modernity and goals of those on the left, nostalgia is, to some degree, inevitable. The inevitability of this nostalgia comes, at least in part, from the depth of what progressives have lost politically during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries:

> In the time of modernity, solidarity and authenticity become idealized and identified with the past. Thus the hope of regaining community and the reintegration of life and labour constantly threatens to offer, or resort to, the pre-capitalist and organic past as a source of socialism's most basic hopes. This

[38] Bonnett himself notes that he conflates the broader "Left" with "radicals" throughout his book: "the connections between the left and radicalism are so deep and run so powerfully through nearly all the material that I will be introducing over the next six chapters that I can claim, at least, a good excuse for collapsing the two" (7). As such, I take this comment to apply to the left more broadly.

> process is also visible within the practice of left activism. The ethos of comradely struggle posits the possibility and need for honest and authentic human relationships and looks forward to the creation of a new world that displays a similar integrity. (Bonnett 29)

This description of nostalgia carefully employs verbs that gesture toward both the negative and positive possibilities of nostalgia, particularly in the second sentence: the "hope of regaining community and the reintegration of life and labour" is an admirable goal, but using "the pre-capitalist and organic past as a source of socialism's most basic hopes" leaves Bonnett ambivalent. Working toward this goal "constantly threatens to *offer*, or *resort to*" the idealized "organic past." While "threatens" signals the danger of nostalgia, "offer" points to positive possibilities and "resort to" indicates a non-ideal but not necessarily problematic gesture. Bonnett's characterization is deeply ambivalent, indicating the possibilities and drawbacks of nostalgia as well as the difficulties of telling the difference.

Bonnett's book in part documents the ways that attitudes toward nostalgia have begun to change. While the left's (and particularly the intellectual left's) general response to nostalgia continues to be reflexively programmed against it,

> Over the past two decades we have seen nostalgia gain its revenge on Marx's attempts to banish and deny it. In what is widely announced to be our post-communist epoch, the left's hostility to nostalgia has begun to look hollow and self-defeating. Sean Scanlan argues that 'nostalgia is no longer the programmatic equivalent of bad memory'. Yet this is a topic still freighted with suspicion. To argue that nostalgia is a chronic dilemma is to suggest that radicalism is both

> backward- and forward-looking. It is also to imply that, when nostalgia is reconsidered by 'progressive' intellectuals, the resulting reassessment is likely to sustain many existing assumptions. (Bonnett 40)

According to Bonnett, to admit to some degree of nostalgia does not mean that one must compromise progressive values. Nostalgia of the type that Samuel Earle writes about in Jacobin is, of course, part of a politics of exclusion; Bonnett hardly denies the reactionary nature of much nostalgia. But he also makes clear that this need not be the case: nostalgia can "sustain many existing assumptions" of left politics. Certain nostalgia might support rather than work against left-political goals. Bonnett's example, taken from the work of Tim Strangleman, is of "a study of the recent privatization of the railways in Britain, in which "nostalgia remains one of the most powerful discourses of resistance. [Strangleman] suggests that nostalgic memories may 'be positive in that they create an increasingly historically-aware popular culture, one therefore that is *less* open to manipulation'"(Bonnett 41). Current uses of progressive-leaning nostalgia are prevalent in United States as well. Consider, for instance, a section of Elizabeth Warren's campaign website advertising her desire to "Rebuild the Middle Class." Warren mixes nostalgia and recognition of injury by promising to "put power back in the hands of workers and unions" even as she acknowledges that "generations [of] people of color have been shut out of their chance to build wealth." Language like "rebuild" and "put power back" suggests an unspecified, but lost time period, not entirely unlike "Make America Great Again," but Warren attempts to mobilize nostalgia in service of a left-political cause by

idealizing the past even as she admits, by acknowledging the injuries of racism, that her conception of it is a fantasy.[39]

Warren's discussion of class and labor contains contradictions, but the contradictions might be read as productive, and don't necessarily make her point moot. Rather, as Svetlana Boym has articulated, responsible versions of nostalgia almost require contradictions. Boym draws a separation between "restorative" and "reflective" versions of nostalgia:

> Restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition, Reflective nostalgia dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity. Restorative nostalgia protects the absolute truth, while reflective nostalgia calls it into doubt. (xviii)

Restorative nostalgia, in this model, functions as what I've been discussing as reactionary nostalgia: it opts for a coherent and often idealized narrative about the past that excludes the instability of modernity that makes "absolute truth" sound naive at best, authoritarian at worst. Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, allows for "ambivalences" and "contradictions," calling narratives about the past into question even as it longs for what has been lost. As I briefly mentioned above, Boym, like Bonnett, sees nostalgia as a fact of modernity, one that we need to accept and then figure out how to deal with. She admits that "unreflected nostalgia breeds monsters," but the idea of reflective nostalgia is meant as a responsible option for dealing with the fact that "the sentiment itself, the mourning of

[39] This remains true whether one considers Warren's politics to be representative of the intellectual left or not. I am certainly not arguing that that is the case. Rather, the point here is not the details of Warren's political position, but that her use of nostalgia falls into Boym's framework for reflective nostalgia.

displacement and temporal irreversibility, is at the very core of the modern condition" (xvi). In Boym's ideal nostalgia, "reflection and longing, estrangement and affection go together." Nostalgia takes on the contradictoriness of modernity while providing an essential emotional and historical function. In my reading of Boym, the distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia allows for those with left-political commitments to reject the kind of nostalgia identified by Samuel Earle and embrace a nostalgia that honors the feelings of loss that modernity brings with it, all the while yearning for a future that is more than an idealized past reanimated. In other words, indulging the pleasures of nostalgic longing can, and should, be teased apart from complicity in injurious political positions and policies.

Reading Nostalgically

Svetlana Boym, as I have discussed above, considers nostalgia as an inevitable outgrowth of modernity, "an affective yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world" that "inevitably reappears as a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals. [It] is coeval with modernity itself" (xiv). Claudia Johnson, protesting against nostalgic readings of Austen, attests to the fact that what Austen's readers nostalgically seek is the "stateliness and stability Austen's world is said to apotheosize," a longing-for that distorts these readers' understandings of Austen as they rate her "class . . . higher and higher, and she herself is claimed to be more conservative" (*Cults* xviii). Boym and Johnson overlap by figuring nostalgia as a response to current upheavals, a longing for "continuity and stability" in a world that many feel as being increasingly fragmentary. While I agree with Johnson's claim that nostalgia can needlessly distort the past,

particularly when it comes to Austen, and thus create blunted and even harmful readings, I also argue that automatic rejections of nostalgia miss the chance to open interpretive avenues by considering both the sources of nostalgia within a text and its potentially productive role in the generation of new interpretations.

I'd like to start from a review of *Persuasion* written by a lay reader whose take on the novel might well make some Austen scholars antsy by typifying what seems like naïve nostalgia:[40]

> I can't tell you how many books I have read the blurb of in contemporary romances where it's a "second chance" romance where the guy or girl returns to the "home town" where they are unexpectedly reunited with the one person who broke their heart years before and then by the end of the book there is a HEA. And 200 years ago when this book was written, long before all those contemporary romance author's great grandmother's were even born, this book also followed that same basic romance path. However, the emotional tension found in these pages are a hard thing to find in books written in this century, where the stirring of feelings are replaced with a stirring of the loins and secondary needless drama to fill out the book. Reading this novel I truly could put myself into the shoes of Anne who finds herself exasperated by her family and friends, wanting more, and not knowing if her romantic feelings are in any way returned. And then that letter! *swoon* Can we go back to a time where men

[40] I have chosen to use a lay reader's response to start my discussion of *Persuasion* not because I'm arguing for lay-reader nostalgia to be *allowed* (I think it should be more than allowed, by critics and lay readers alike), but simply because critics often locate nostalgic impulse within a lay-audience and tend to avoid it themselves This particular reader gives easy access to a nostalgia that can be turned into productive interpretive material.

> wrote romantic letters instead of short texts with emoticons? I would still like to keep the modern amenities of hygiene, healthcare, and travel, for the record. ("Holly")

This reader is nostalgic on multiple levels: there is implicit surprise and satisfaction that a storyline now frequently replicated was written "long before all those contemporary romance author's great grandmother's were even born." There is, more explicitly, a longing for writing with stakes that depend not on sensationalism and overt sexuality—both perhaps based (in this reader's estimation) on superficial connections between people—but on emotional investments. We might connect this desire for emotional investment with the most explicit nostalgia found here, flagged by the phrase "Can we go back": the heterosexual longing for men who "wrote romantic letters instead of short texts with emoticons" Men now, the reader seems to complain, refuse to do emotional labor: they will neither set aside the time needed to express themselves, nor work to find the words that would most adequately do so. This concern might be broadened beyond a heterosexual romantic context to consider the problem of emotional labor and contact more generally. Digital technology and family living arrangements, among other things, have tended to increase our sense of social isolation and disconnection from others. Frequent digital contact often substitutes itself for more intimate forms of contact that require greater attunement between people, an attunement that we watch Anne and Frederick struggle to achieve through the course of *Persuasion*—a struggle that is ultimately rewarded when Wentworth feels confident enough in Anne's feelings and desires to write the letter that pleases this reader so much.

What this reader also does, however, is demonstrate basic awareness and reflectiveness about her own nostalgia.[41] While she longs for emotional tension and expression, she's also capable of articulating some of the major costs that a full return to early nineteenth-century life entails (transportation, health care, hygiene). In this way, she seems to represent half of Claudia Johnson's complaint by invoking stability and escape half of it by acknowledging some distinctly unstately facets of early nineteenth-century life. This reflectiveness and the possibility of contradiction created by it extends to the reader's relationship to Anne Elliot as a character. In spite of the reader's naïve identification with Anne, I remain curious about her gesture toward the numerous constraints Anne Elliot lives under, summed up by her statement that Anne "finds herself exasperated by her family and friends, wanting more, and not knowing if her romantic feelings are in any way returned." Anne's family and friends refuse to support her original engagement with Wentworth and range, in their relationship to Anne and her feelings, from being completely self-involved to being well-meaning but ignorant. Anne's "not knowing if her romantic feelings are in any way returned" gestures toward the long-term communication breakdown between herself and Wentworth that depends, in large part, on an enforced feminine passivity that does not allow Anne to directly express her desires and that dictates the circumstances (physical, social, and otherwise) in which she is able to pursue them.

Why do this reader's nostalgic impulses seem to heighten around the constraints Anne encounters, constraints that belie the idea of a simpler or more stable time? Or,

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[41] We might, of course, hope for more reflection here, and there is fodder for critique on display in her thinking (its heteronormativity comes to mind). Still, I'd like to focus on the reflectiveness that does come through as a bridge to a sophisticated interpretive nostalgia allowed by the contradictions that reflectiveness brings on.

conversely, what do the contradictions inherent in the reader's position help us to notice about the text? I'd like to argue here that Austen renders both the social constraints under which Anne must operate and the positive struggle for attunement that Anne and Wentworth undertake (and which the reader ends up finding so romantic both in the form of "emotional tension" throughout the novel in the form of the letter) visible through a small but consistent linguistic choice. This linguistic choice impacts our emotional orientation toward Anne and, to a lesser degree, Wentworth, as well as the intersubjectivity Austen creates between Anne and other characters throughout the novel. Throughout *Persuasion*, Austen's narrator articulates Anne's thoughts, feelings and actions with mediation from the word "could"; Austen uses this word in the context of Anne's feelings more than eighty times throughout the novel—it's often present in narrations of Anne's responses. I include several examples in order to demonstrate the variety of constructions in which Austen uses "could" in relation to Anne's thoughts and intersubjective actions:

> She often told herself it was folly, before she *could* harden her nerves sufficiently to feel the continual discussion of the Crofts and their business no evil. (67)
>
> Mary talked, but she *could not* attend. She had seen him. They had met. They had been once more in the same room! (98)
>
> Anne *could not but* be amused at the idea of her coming to Lyme, to preach patience and resignation to a young man whom she had never seen before; nor *could* she help fearing, on more serious reflection, that, like many other great moralists and preachers, she had been eloquent on a point in which her own conduct would ill bear examination. (149)
>
> She *could* thoroughly comprehend the sort of fascination he must possess over Lady Russell's mind, the difficulty it must be for her to withdraw her eyes, the astonishment she must be feeling. (231)
>
> Anne *could just* acknowledge within herself such a possibility of having been induced to marry him, as made her shudder at the idea of the misery which must have followed. (263)

While Austen uses a variety of constructions, their effect is the same insofar as in each case what Anne "could" or "could not" do is used as a stand in for what she did or did not do. Take the second to last of these as an example: it could easily be rewritten to say, "She thoroughly comprehended the sort of fascination . . ." The second of the sentences could be rewritten to say, "Mary talked, but she did not attend. She had seen him…"

Why does Austen regularly avoid directly narrating what Anne does in favor of narrating what she could or could not manage to do? For one thing, "could" serves to explain and even excuse instances in which Anne acts less than perfectly. It distracts from Anne's actual action (or inaction) and alludes to the wave of feeling behind it. In, "Mary talked, but she could not attend," replacing "could" with "did" makes Anne rude—a bit too much like her sister Mary for comfort; it suggests that she's too wrapped up in her own affairs to bother with someone else's perspective. With "could," even as Anne fails to be perfectly polite, we understand the enormous emotional weight that has caused this failure, and we also understand that Anne would like to be able to attend to Mary. Similar situations happen frequently enough throughout the book. In her first meeting with the Crofts, confused about which Wentworth brother is being spoken of, Anne is apparently unable to properly participate until she realizes that it's not Frederick being spoken of, when "She could now answer as she ought" (87). When Wentworth removes little Charles Musgrove from her back, Anne "could not even thank him. She could only hang over little Charles, with most disordered feelings," and when finally Mary and the Miss Musgroves enter, Anne leaves immediately, with the narrator telling us "She could not stay" (120-21). "Could" manages to make Anne's failures appealing by relating what Anne does to the hypothetically correct action in each case. When Anne

"could not attend" to Mary, the construction "could not" not only narrates what Anne doesn't manage to do, but also implies the possibility and rightness of the opposite. Austen's comment to Fanny Knight regarding *Persuasion*, that she "may *perhaps* like the Heroine, as she is almost too good for me," gestures both toward Anne's goodness and toward her failings, which allow that "almost" to make its way into the sentence. Anne is perfect in knowing what's right and in striving to do it, but not always perfect in execution.

Compare these examples with a subtly different use of "could" in relation to Mr. Elliot, who upon meeting Anne formally for the first time, wishes to spend his time talking with her about Lyme: "But he must not be addressing his reflections to Anne alone; he knew it; he was soon diffused again among the others, and it was only at intervals that *he could* return to Lyme" (195, my emphasis). Anne's actions are also often presented in terms of what must or ought to be done, but Austen uniformly presents her desires as being in line with those ideals, even when she doesn't reach them. Mr. Elliot, rather, feels his duty to others as an annoyance, a burden that takes him away from what he really wants to be doing, what is pleasurable to him, and "could" gets used against duty here in order to subtly demonstrate Mr. Elliot's false front. Austen also uses "could" to highlight Elizabeth's failure in response to the Musgroves' arrival in Bath:

> Elizabeth was, for a short time, suffering a good deal. She felt that Mrs. Musgrove and all her party ought to be asked to dine with them, but she *could not bear* to have the difference of style, the reduction of servants, which a dinner must betray, witnessed by those who had been always so inferior to the Elliots of Kellynch. It

> was a struggle between propriety and vanity; but vanity got the better, and then Elizabeth was happy again. (273, my emphasis)

Anne's failures in relation to what's right come from a desire to act properly confronted with an onslaught of emotions that make it temporarily impossible, but never from an actual contradiction between Anne's values and what's owed to others. Elizabeth, on the other hand, "could not bear" the situation because her values and proper respect for others contradict each other, and she can resolve her own internal tension only by determining to neglect what's due to others in favor of saving her own pride.

Notably, when Austen uses "could" in relation to Wentworth, it gets used similarly to its use with Anne, though perhaps slightly less sympathetically given that Wentworth often uses it to narrate his own actions, and thus loses the authority of the narrator's judgment that often gets attached to Anne's actions. When Anne and Wentworth have come to an understanding and are walking through Bath, Wentworth uses "could" almost compulsively to narrate his former mind-state, answering Anne's protest that "no duty could be called in aid" for her to marry Mr. Elliot:

> 'Perhaps I ought to have reasoned thus,' he replied, 'but I *could not*. I *could not* derive benefit from the late knowledge I had acquired of your character. I *could not* bring it into play: it was overwhelmed, buried, lost in those earlier feelings which I had been smarting under year after year. I *could* think of you only as one who had yielded, who had given me up, who had been influenced by any one rather than me. (297, my emphasis)

Wentworth's long coming-to-terms with Anne's former actions and his unresolved feelings about them gets framed here as inevitable, a matter not of knowing or not

knowing how to properly judge a situation, but rather of being able to put those faculties to use or not. Wentworth's paralysis ends when he learns of Louisa's engagement:

> 'Here,' said he, 'ended the worst of my state; for now I *could* at least put myself in the way of happiness, I *could* exert myself, I *could* do something . . . Was it unpardonable to think it worth my while to come? and to arrive, with some degree of hope? You were single. It was possible that you might retain the feelings of the past, as I did; and one encouragement happened to be mine. I *could never* doubt that you would be loved and sought by others, but I know to a certainty that you had refused one man at least, of better pretensions than myself: and I *could not help* often saying, Was this for me?' (296, my emphasis)

Wentworth has been prevented from action by the realization of his perceived commitment to Louisa. Social constraints dictating what Wentworth owes to Louisa get converted into a sense of possibility in action, which then shifts into more general emotional possibility.

The conflation, present in relation to both Wentworth and Anne, between what's possible under social constraints and what's possible emotionally, is my main concern here. Wentworth moves fluidly from saying what he could do once social norms no longer constrained him to saying what he could not help doing emotionally as a result. Social constraints are not stated, but implied as inverse conditions to characters' emotional striving. With "Anne could not attend," the socially proper action, inconvenient as paying attention to Mary might be—and however little of interest she might have to say—is to attend to Mary. But Austen does not merely say that Anne failed

to meet an expectation and instead translates that expectation into emotional striving on Anne's part.

I have been arguing that Austen's use of "could" allows social expectations to be translated into emotional striving on the part of Anne Elliot and Frederick Wentworth. I'd like to return now to the review with which I opened this consideration of *Persuasion*. As I earlier discussed, the review demonstrates tension between (a perhaps naïve) wishing to be and empathizing with Anne Elliot, particularly in the moment she receives the letter from Captain Wentworth, and recognizing the enforced social rules that render Anne relatively passive and incapable of exerting more control over her own fate. While Wentworth could have returned to renew his courtship of Anne at any time during the eighth-year period between engagements, Anne had no such recourse, not even recourse to writing a letter of the type that Wentworth finally writes. The writer of the review at least partially recognizes this, but still romanticizes the letter itself and the happily ever after of the novel. I argue that Austen's frequent use of "could" should be understood as a sort of textual companion to the reader's nostalgia. Austen rewrites the burden of social expectations as a striving for responsiveness and attunement that, though it sometimes fails, allows nearly every character in the novel to trust and confide in Anne, including, eventually, Wentworth. In the word "could" we recognize both constraint in its delimiting of other options, and possibility in its acknowledgment of what emotional feats our heroine might be capable of. We recognize both Anne's enforced passivity and the energy and agency that allow for her to build intimacy between herself and others anyway. And we recognize our own hunger for such intimacy. Reading with reflective nostalgia thus allows us to generate a reading that speaks to our feeling of (and longing

for) intimacy when reading Jane Austen without papering over the unequal and gendered expectations that form the background for such efforts at attunement. We thus manage to speak to our own longing without abandoning a commitment to exposing and describing insidious consequences of unequal distributions of power, and we manage, through the complicated pleasure that nostalgia provides, to decouple pleasure and complicity.

How (Not) To Do Things With Nostalgia

My argument in this chapter is not for all nostalgia related to Austen's work to be embraced. While the left has its own long history of nostalgia, and while nostalgia might have its uses apart from romanticization of past inequities and injury, the potential for its misuse remains. Austen's own conservatism has, of course, been vigorously debated, both in terms of her contemporary moment and our own. These moments often seem to bleed together into a surreal political opposition between Austen as anti-jacobin novelist—a political characterization articulated most famously, but certainly not exclusively, by Marilyn Butler[42]— on the basis of the events of Austen's time, and Austen as cultural conservative as represented in "the 'cultural wars' over the figure of Jane Austen during the 1980s and 1990s [in which] the linkage of Austen to sexuality . . . scandalized journalists," with Eve Sedgwick and Terry Castle in particular "decried as tenured radicals recklessly and gleefully flying in the face of the self-evident truth of Austen's primness and defiling her purity in the process" (*Cults* 151). Terry Castle's rather exasperated response to the homophobic media coverage of "Was Jane Austen Gay?" includes a description of the troublingly sanitized idea that many seem to have of Austen:

[42] See *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*

> ‘I think there is a kind of fetishizing of Austen, not only among British academics, but among a lot of people who join Jane Austen societies, of which there are still a number in England. And [the press coverage] triggered off a very primitive reaction in people who use her to project their own fantasies about the past, and the purity of the past.’ Because Austen also has become ‘an icon of the early 19th-century spinster,’ Castle said, ‘people tend to view her as asexual, as not having had any sort of sensual life at all.’ (“Terri”)

The response to Castle was not just about having “any sort of a sensual life,” but one involving even a trace of homoerotic feeling: “People have reacted as though I'd desecrated the temple or something [. . .] Many people still consider it a terrible slur if you suggest that a person like Jane Austen might have had homosexual feelings.” This is nostalgia as bad memory, a tool that idealizes (and longs for) the past based on an exclusionary politics in the present. Nostalgia like this diminishes and constrains, asking Austen and the period to be less than they were and in some ways continuing work like Chapman’s. Henry Austen, Jane’s brother, almost immediately pushed for this kind of nostalgia, painting her as a “genteel amateur, the spinster lady author who sketched her novels in moments of leisure” rather than as a professional author “acutely conscious of her sales” (1). In all of these cases people attempt to control the narrative by conveniently leaving out important facts of the case that might contradict their assertions.

To return to the distinction that I drew at the beginning of this chapter, the distinction between public and private, between political and personal, I’ll quote an anecdote from Alastair Bonnett at length:

> The disjunction between these two worlds of nostalgia - the public and the private - can sometime catch us out. A little while ago I bumped into an academic colleague in one of those publicly owned stately homes and gardens that draw in the weekend crowds across England. Our awkwardness was palpable and mutual. I think we both would have liked to find a loophole; to make a few disparaging remarks about the tweeness and the suspect nationalism of it all. Perhaps we could pretend we had been dragged along. Just observing the crowds. But some lies are too obvious to appear polite. So then what? Could we admit to have travelled miles from the brutal and noisy city to enjoy walking round the beautiful old gardens of a long departed gentry? Not that either. The shame would be too much. We were left with a mutually indulgent set of nods and smirks, registering not simply the humour that we could find in the situation but the fact, thankfully, that *off duty,* our nostalgia was forgivable. (6)

Bonnett's discomfort derives from a contradiction underlying his interpretation of the estate. On the one hand, the house and gardens represent "tweeness and the suspect nationalism," a connection with England's past, and particularly a nostalgically imagined past of relative peace that opposes the "brutal and noisy city" to "the beautiful old gardens of a long departed gentry." The suspicion is that a longing for such a place to some degree indicates a longing for the historical circumstances that allowed for such a pleasant place to exist, and those historical circumstances contain many unpleasant happenings, practices, and laws. On the other hand, sometimes a house is just a house. Sometimes relative quiet, sunshine, and olfactory pleasure are just enlivening. Perhaps it

doesn't commit one to a nostalgia characteristic of a reactionary political position. At least, as long as it stays "*off-duty*," it is "forgivable."

I suspect that many of us will find both the impulse to visit such a house and our embarrassment at having been discovered there familiar. A photo of me from a recent trip to the Lake District shows me beaming into the camera as I sit crouched before a wrought iron fence in front of several headstones in St. Oswald's churchyard in Grasmere; the headstones peaking out behind me are the markers of William and Dorothy Wordsworth's graves. On the hike there earlier that day, I spent a blissful thirty minutes drinking coffee and demolishing a particularly good slice of Victoria sandwich on the grounds of Rydal Hall, located very near to Rydal Mount, a house that would fall into the category of the "stately homes and gardens" that Alastair Bonnett admits to visiting in the passage above As I traipsed across the eastern half of the Lake District, I reflected on what had brought me there. What had I hoped to find? The Lake District as Wordsworth knew it? Wordsworth himself? No. I wasn't so naive as that. But I was happy to be *a little* naive. I *did* want to feel closer to the poets whose work I had spent so much time with; sometimes I wanted this to the point of being embarrassing to my husband, who, for instance, stood by stoically when I over-excitedly edged out our Dove Cottage tour guide and answered a question, clearly meant for her, from another member of our tour group (he wanted to know how Wordsworth managed to use the bootless ice skates on display upstairs). Having read and written about Wordsworth according to Jerome McGann's against-the-grain approach in *The Romantic Ideology*, I was still tickled to see that Wordsworth, having run out of room to write his name inside of his little traveling case,

simply added the "H" just above the rest of it, a solution that just about anyone who has ever made a handmade birthday card or yard sale sign has reluctantly employed.

I am not advocating for a naive fan-culture to pervade the profession. I do, however, wish to echo Rita Felski when she asks, in the Introduction to *The Limits of Critique*: "Why—even as we extol multiplicity, difference, hybridity—is the affective range of criticism so limited? Why are we so hyperarticulate about our adversaries and so excruciatingly tongue-tied about our loves?" (13) As the logic of large, corporate Universities has continued to threaten the humanities more broadly and English as a discipline specifically, the profession has taken on a more and more defensive position, not only toward University administrations and state legislatures, but also toward intellectual and political foes. All-too-often we assume a protective rather than an assertive position, and as such, we often, as Lisa Ruddick identifies, end up throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Ruddick has argued that the trauma of encountering the things we love in the hands of those whose positions we find troubling (at best) has caused many to react not by asserting their own reasons for loving these things, but rather by shunning them—by treating them as damaged goods.

What Ruddick does not articulate, however, is a convincing alternative to this shunning. How to embrace our loves, be less "tongue-tied" about them, responsibly? Ruddick argues that the way forward is "to encourage more work [that] does not see the threat of being called a humanist as a reason not to press forward conceptually." But that does not solve the problem of the many critiques that have been fairly lodged at humanism over the years. A better option might be to revisit the way we think of our work's relationship to politics, assuming that the relationship will always require a degree

of ambivalence and a willingness to both assume and work within contradictions. Put another way, our work lies at the crossroads of the personal and the political; we read literature in ways that meaningfully elaborates on the politics of the time in which a piece was written, the results of which are often political implications in our own time. Literature is an artifact of, and simultaneously produces, public and political life. At the same time, most people, including those inside the profession, also often times recognize literature as a private experience, one with personal meaning that offers something particular to each individual reader. In the last few decades, we have turned these two facets of literature into adversaries, often at least implying that the pleasurable, private experience of reading is at odds with political responsibility. Cue the endless discussion of Janeites and their reading practices. It may be that many modes of private, pleasurable reading are not, in fact, compatible with a politically responsible orientation toward literature, but that isn't always the case.

Nostalgia itself is an individual emotion, but it is also a historical emotion that can be put to political use. That is, one can feel nostalgia for an earlier time, or one can create a political position that appeals to individual longing or perhaps even creates such longing. Individual and political nostalgia are bound up with one another: they generate each other and are influenced by each other. That said, they are not identical and shouldn't be mistaken as such. Nostalgia is pleasurable and it straddles the private and the political divide; it embodies the kinds of contradictions and dissonances that literary studies will need to grapple with in order to handle the tension between pleasure and political responsibility. The Janeite-critic relationship, to oversimplify things a bit, can serve as a particularly salient example of this tension, with Janeite pleasure and nostalgia

falling under critical suspicion. When it doesn't fall under suspicion, critics often have a difficult time articulating why such pleasure should count as valuable, politically or otherwise (see Brodie and Johnson above). Ruddick has this problem on a larger scale, arguing for more pleasure and humanity in literary studies without explaining how the humanism she seems to argue for can get out from under the weight of past critiques.

Reflective nostalgia that embraces the contradictions of modernity—the double-binds in which we all find ourselves as we attempt to act ethically in a world that withholds knowledge of the consequences of our actions—spans the divide between the private and the political, particularly in literary studies, where the longings and even feelings of loss we experience in response to a text might tell us as much as our historical and political analyses do about the way that text operates (just think of Dames's reinterpretation of Austen's later works). A study of literature that allows for "reflection and longing, estrangement and affection [to] go together" would both consider negative and positive consequences of these things and celebrate and mourn the conditions of modernity that have created their presence. We can acknowledge both the feeling and the thought and ask how best to bring them into harmony.

Wendy Brown argues that political theorists ought to shift the way they talk about progressive politics away from a language of "being," which lends itself to a politics that inscribes and reinscribes injury, to a language of "wanting," which lends itself to a politics that positively envisions a future. In essence, Wendy Brown asks us to play offense, articulating a political future rather than playing defense against those who would deny the sins of the past. Brown also argues against Nietzschean "forgetting," thus allowing us to recognize the injuries of the past without constructing a politics around

them. By not constructing a politics around injury, we allow ourselves to untangle responsibility from pleasure, public/political reading from private/pleasurable reading. Oriented forward, we have the ability to negotiate the roles that literature might play in a juster future that recognizes not only the compatibility of pleasure and responsibility, but the need of those working for a juster world to experience the kinds of pleasure and reflection that literature can so amply afford. This brings me back to the second of my two epigraphs: "The longing for human wholeness, for lives not blighted by isolation and alienation, for a green earth: these are the ordinary aspirations that define the limits of modernity and the nature of our loss. In acknowledging nostalgia we also acknowledge hope" (Bonnett 173). While Wendy Brown casually dismisses nostalgia as problematic, Bonnett reminds us that nostalgia is as much about the future as the past. Reflected upon and understood, nostalgia allows for past experience to turn into future action, acknowledging but closing off the past from the injuries that have occurred there (think of Dames's articulation of what nostalgia does for Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*) and orienting us toward our hopes for the future. Literature, while entangled in a larger mass of historical discourse, is uniquely able to perform a similar kind of time warp, allowing us to experience the strangeness and distance of the past even as that past comes to bear on the present and perhaps the future. Fiction in particular allows us to safely fantasize about the past (after all, the fantasy is ready-made) and to allow the past to push back. Allowing and articulating the fantasy and longing of reflective nostalgia within literary studies can encourage the kind of future-oriented politics that Wendy Brown describes, while also, importantly, making us better, more flexible interpreters.

Anxiety in the Archive: Carlyle's Editor in *Sartor Resartus* and Literary Critics Now

The disorientation we experience in the archive is arguably more valuable than the promise of objectivity that draws us to it. The archive is a contingent theater of aesthetic encounter; it offers its own unique sense (and we mean sense) of vertigo, pleasure, and surprise
Carrie Hyde and Joseph Rezek, "The Aesthetics of Archival Evidence"

We, safe in the stronghold of Historical Fidelity, are careless.
Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus

Of the lack of previous scholarly attention to readers' love for books and authors, Deidre Lynch says in *Loving Literature* that: "failure to explore readers' wish for relationship registers, among other things, humanities disciplines' long-held investment in the notion that there may be a special epistemic virtue in practicing criticism from a position of alienation" (10).[43] Here Lynch points out that literary critics now tend to ignore the emotional connection that readers have with texts,[44] but the desire to remain alienated stretches back a lot further. Lynch documents, for instance, Samuel Johnson's reluctance to love literature—a reluctance fueled in part by the period's changing understanding of gift-giving and patronage as practices, as "in the eighteenth century [. .

[43] Studying Romanticism in particular sometimes seems to require a position of alienation. I discuss this briefly in my first chapter, citing Thomas Pfau's reluctance in the introduction to *Romantic Moods* to agree with "transhistorical claims in Eichendorff or Wordsworth" lest his agreement be "construed as a reactionary call," or a buying-into of Romantic ideology (24). So too with critics' responses to Janeites, so often a mix of fascination and distaste; the blurb for Deidre Lynch's anthology on Janeites gets it right when it says Janeites "have been frequently invoked and often derided by the critical establishment," and Lynch herself, in her introduction to Belknap Press's annotated edition of *Mansfield Park,* notes that "since the late Victorian period, numerous readers have greeted Austen's novels as though they were carriers of news from a bygone world, one more romantic, tasteful, cozy, or stable and settled," whereas "Austen scholars tend to promote a more disenchanted view" (*Janeites, Mansfield Park*)

[44] Though, as in Rita Felski's work, this assumption has begun to change somewhat. As Stephen Best writes, the "post-critical" methods that Felski and others advocate for change the emotional terms of criticism: "Where suspicious practices of reading tend to make a virtue of critical detachment, postcritical reading strives for intimacy and engagement" (340).

.]the terms ‘patronize’ and ‘condescension’ first begin to designate bad things, and [. . .] the patron-client relationships that had organized the conferral and reception of benefits came under suspicion in new ways” (40). Under this new suspicion toward patronizing relationships, the fact “that the gift of literature would necessarily be a gift disbursed from above” undercuts the potential for a straightforwardly loving relationship between a reader and literature. Johnson exemplifies this with his resistance to his own emotional responses to literature and thus comes across “as paradigmatically modern, someone estranged from older, precapitalist, paternalist traditions, who displays that estrangement by emphatically setting himself against any possible alignment of mastery and belovedness” (48-49).

The pleasure of loving literature, and especially of loving a particular author of that literature, comes with the potential cost of emotional debt, of gratitude, of the “alignment of mastery and belovedness.” Anxiety over our relationships with, or perhaps more accurately, *to* authors, often derives from a sort of literary love that Lynch investigates in *Loving Literature*, a love tinged with hatred, so that “the scholar who seeks to assemble a historical phenomenology of literariness does not have to choose between eros and agon. Indeed, she often can’t” (11). In this chapter, I’d like to consider this love-anxiety in terms of Thomas Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34), though not to straightforwardly apply Lynch’s reasoning. The emotional relationships that Carlyle’s Editor character exhibits toward Professor Teufelsdröckh, the knowledge Teufelsdröckh has produced, and his own editorial work are characterized by an oscillation between ebullience and anxiety as the Editor shifts between intense admiration for, and deep frustration with, Teufelsdröckh. In the Editor’s case, this love-hate relationship takes on a

generally unhealthy tone, and in fact this is part of the point, as Carlyle uses the Editor to articulate the troublesome nature of a neurotic approach to knowledge that obsesses over verification of facts and cringes at hermeneutic risks—an approach to knowledge that is overly dependent upon "gift[s] disbursed from above."

In *Sartor*, the Editor performs what for this chapter I will call an epistemological theodicy.[45] Though occasionally ambivalent, in his desire to justify the importance of his own work the Editor tends toward hero worship of Professor Teufelsdröckh. In particular, the Editor both believes, and generates, biographical facts about Teufelsdröckh that have striking parallels to Christ, thus making a transition from the usual definition of theodicy, as an explanation or justification of God's goodness in the face of evil, to a secular definition in which Teufelsdröckh becomes God and the Editor a secular theologian. M. H. Abrams has already, in *Natural Supernaturalism*, fit Carlyle into a tradition of what he calls "secular theodicy," which he argues takes root in the Romantic period. According to Abrams, Carlyle raises

> the problem of what is 'at present called Origin of Evil,' an ever-recurring question which each age must resolve anew, 'for it is man's nature to change his Dialect from century to century; he cannot help it though he would.' Carlyle's solution […] transfers the problem of theodicy to the private life, and justifies sorrow and suffering as the necessary conditions for achieving the wisdom, resignation, and power of insight which are the attributes of maturity […] To Carlyle the wisdom of maturity is based on the recognition of the sacredness of

[45] In this chapter I will largely focus on the role of the Editor of *Sartor Resartus*. I do so not because I think the Clothes Philosophy or the figure of Teufelsdröckh are unimportant, but rather because my focus in this dissertation is on the acts and affects of literary critics, and the Editor more closely performs the role that literary critics perform now than does Teufelsdröckh.

> suffering and 'Divine Depth of Sorrow,' and also on the renunciation of 'pleasure' and the 'Love of Happiness' in order to 'find Blessedness' through a salutary and self-validating 'Worship of Sorrow.' (132)

In his exploration of secular theodicy, Abrams focuses on Teufelsdröckh's personal transformation across the "The Everlasting No," "The Centre of Indifference," and "The Everlasting Yea," in which the suffering of "The Everlasting No" and revelations of "The Centre of Indifference" contribute to the spiritual success of "The Everlasting Yea." Abrams's focus is on the way that Carlyle portrays Teufelsdröckh's journey as a successful secular theodicy, but I would like to argue that he also positions the Editor's ongoing relationship to Teufelsdröckh and his work as a foil to this theodicy. That is, the Editor undertakes what turns out to be an unsuccessful secular theodicy as he argues for Teufelsdröckh as a genius, and for *Die Kleider* as "new Truth" even in the face of epistemological uncertainty in regard to his work (*Sartor* 8). This theodicy brings the Editor through a gamut of emotions, from the absolute joy of strong faith to the trough of sorrow that is spiritual doubt.

Teufelsdröckh has and later overcomes a spiritual crisis, and the Editor does something similar, though in an intellectual sense: his faith in Teufelsdröckh as an author depends upon the outcome of his epistemological struggle as he reckons with what, in this secular theodicy, constitutes the primary evil that challenges the supposed genius (benevolence) of Teufelsdröckh (God): unknowability or uncertainty over facts. The Editor's epistemological theodicy seems to turn on the question: how can I justify spreading the "good news" of Teufelsdröckh's philosophy if the philosophy, and its author's autobiographical documents, are epistemologically compromised, or imperfect?

The possibility of a complete theodicy in its usual sense is the possibility that, "for every actual evil found in the world, one can describe some state of affairs that it is reasonable to believe exists, and which is such that, if it exists, will provide an omnipotent and omniscient being with a morally sufficient reason for allowing the evil in question" (Tooley). Given the Editor's proclamations of Teufelsdröckh's genius, we can read his text as a theodicy in which he attempts to account for why an author (one who is supposedly a genius with an important message for the world) would have sufficient reason to cultivate uncertainty in a text that, in the Editor's view, should function in service of increasing knowledge.

The Editor's parallels between Teufelsdröckh and God persist throughout *Sartor*. Titling the first chapter of Book II (the book in which the Editor dedicates himself most to Teufelsdröckh's biography) *Genesis*, the Editor notes that "in every phenomenon the Beginning remains always the most notable moment." In this case the beginning serves as a first cause in the Editor's exegesis of the clothes philosophy. Stipulating that "with regard to any great man, we rest not till, for our scientific profit or not, the whole circumstances of his first appearance in this Planet, and what manner of Public Entry he made, are with utmost completeness rendered manifest," the Editor registers his disappointment at being largely frustrated in this goal:

> To the Genesis of our Clothes-Philosopher, then, be this First Chapter consecrated. Unhappily, indeed, he seems to be of quite obscure extraction; uncertain, we might almost say, whether or any: so that this Genesis of his can properly be nothing but an Exodus (or transit out of Invisibility into Visibility); whereof the preliminary portion is nowhere forthcoming. (63)

The repetitive, nearly ostentatious, use of Biblical language in the passage flags that we should read this portion much as we might read Genesis itself, or, perhaps more importantly (given that Teufelsdröckh is a baby in a basket), the Gospel of Luke. Teufelsdröckh has, of course, been delivered in a "Basket, overhung with green Persian silk" (the luxurious gifts of the Magi come to mind) to the family he grows up with, the Futterals, by a mysterious stranger, whose coming and going strikes the narrator as odd enough that the event is described as "so gentle, noiseless, that the Futterals could have fancied it all a trick of Imagination, or some visit from an authentic Spirit" (65). Just as the angel Gabriel visits Mary, so a mysterious stranger visits the Futterals to announce the coming of their son.

Teufesldrockh's similarities to Jesus continue throughout the middle of his life. Leonard Deen describes Teufelsdröckh's Watchtower, for instance, as a means by which "Teufelsdröckh places himself symbolically in the 'middle'—between Heaven and Earth—in a position of semi-apotheosis" (444). Teufelsdröckh's position as part of both Earth and Heaven, representative of both separately and simultaneously, mirrors the Christian doctrine of Incarnation, in which the son of God is made into a man while retaining divinity. Tethered to earth, Teufelsdröckh remains importantly separate from mankind through his physical position between heaven and earth and through his intellectual capabilities, which the Editor assumes are extraordinary. Another mid-life overlap between Teufelsdröckh and Jesus comes in "The Everlasting No," which, despite the Editor's comparison between Teufelsdröckh and both Cain and the Wandering Jew, ends with a parallel to Jesus as Teufelsdröckh rejects the temptation of the spiritual

wilderness of "The Everlasting No," an echo of Jesus's "Away from me, Satan!" of Matthew 4:10:

> The Everlasting No had said: 'Behold, thou art fatherless, outcast, and the Universe is mine (the Devil's)'; To which my whole Me now made answer: '*I* am not thine, but Free, and forever hate thee." (126)

Just as Satan pushes Jesus to worship him in *Matthew*, so the spiritual desert of the Everlasting No speaks to Teufelsdröckh, telling him, in essence, that the Devil, not God, rules over him: just as Jesus rejects the prospect of being ruled by Satan, so too does Teufelsdröckh.

The beginning and middle of Teufelsdröckh's life mirror that of Jesus, and the end is no different. When Teufelsdröckh disappears, the Editor oscillates between disbelief and faith in his eventual return. He announces that "Professor Teufelsdröckh, be it known, is no longer visibly present at Weissnichtwo, but again to all appearance lost in Space!" (216). The language, in which Teufelsdröckh is "no longer visibly present" and "to all appearance lost in Space," evokes a vanishing that, given the other references to Jesus throughout, might call to mind Jesus's empty tomb at the resurrection. Hofrath Heuschrecke's letter to the Editor upon this event includes his hope for Teufelsdröckh's return:

> Reason we have, at least of a negative sort, to believe the Lost still living: our widowed heart also whispers that ere long he will himself give a sign. Otherwise, indeed, must his archives, one day, be opened by Authority; where much, perhaps the *Palingenesie* itself, is thought to be reposited. (218)

Heuschrecke has faith in Teufelsdröckh's return in physical form or, failing that, in his written records, with the hope that in whatever form he comes, Teufelsdröckh holds the key to *Paligenesie,* a societal rebirth, as in the second coming of Christ, when the world would be remade.

For the Editor, the disappearance of Teufelsdröckh solidifies unknowability, with the possibility of his return amounting to the Editor's version of paradise: a remade world in which everything is certain, in which everything he writes can be verified by either the presence of Teufelsdröckh's documents or Teufelsdröckh himself. The "evil" presupposed by the Editor in his quest to complete a theodicy is the evil of a lack of verifiable knowledge (or even worse, the potential sabotage of his attempts to access verifiable knowledge). He demonstrates the most discomfort not when he has doubts whether particular points of Teufelsdröckh's philosophy are wise or misguided, but rather when he is confronted by the need to interpret, by his inability to build the empirically sturdy bridge he originally set out to build:

> Along this most insufficient, unheard-of Bridge, which the Editor, by Heaven's blessing, has now seen himself enabled to conclude if not complete, it cannot be his sober calculation, but only his fond hope, that many have travelled without accident. No firm arch, overspanning the Impassable with paved highway, could the Editor construct; only, as was said, some zigzag series of rafts floating tumultuously thereon. Alas, and the leaps from raft to raft were too often of a breakneck character; the darkness, the nature of the element, all was against us! (197)

While the Editor laments this "zigzag series of rafts," this is one way of describing the nature of interpretation more broadly. All texts, containing gaps, require their readers to undertake "leaps from raft to raft." Carlyle employs an Editor character who craves verifiable fact and avoids hermeneutic risk as a sort of diagnostic tool for the ills of an age he understands to be overzealously committed to an empirical epistemological framework. His Editor tends to seek out epistemologically stable ground (and the positive feelings of stability and certainty that it might seem to allow) by committing himself to the verification of facts and to eschewing hermeneutic work. But his commitment to verification and lack of trust in his ability at (and the validity of) meaning-making leads to neuroticism in relation to his work. The Editor figure, for Carlyle, represents the spiritual wreckage of an age obsessed with verifiable knowledge. The Editors' anxious neuroticism—recognizable from a 21st-century perspective as at least bordering on mental illness—serves as an articulation by Carlyle of what he saw as the spiritual disease of the society in which he lived. In what follows, I consider Carlyle's gradual unfolding of the consequences of the epistemological orientation expressed through the Editor; Carlyle begins by showing the Editor grappling with the type of work he is engaged in but escalates the situation to show the Editor's deterioration as a result of his quest for verification.

From the beginning of *Sartor Resartus* we see (from an ironic distance) the Editor struggle with the type of knowledge he's engaged with. Carlyle establishes the Editor's wrongheaded thinking on this subject from the first page: the book's opening features the Editor ruminating on the progress of knowledge in his time and establishing the need for the Philosophy of Clothes that he's about to guide us through by demonstrating the oddity

that in "our present advanced state of culture" "hitherto little or nothing of a fundamental character, whether in the way of Philosophy or History, has been written on the subject of Clothes" (3). Immediately Carlyle introduces ironic distance between his reader and the fictional Editor as the Editor invokes the wrong intellectual tradition in which to place *Die Kleider*, placing it within a tradition of natural philosophy:

> Our Theory of Gravitation is as good as perfect: Lagrange, it is well known, has proved that the Planetary System, on this scheme, will endure forever; Laplace, still more cunningly, even guesses that it could not have been made on any other scheme. Whereby, at least, our nautical Logbooks can be better kept; and water-transport of all kinds has grown more commodious. Of Geology and Geognosy we know enough. (3)

By placing *Die Kleider* in this intellectual context, the Editor begins his work assuming that the purpose of that text is to reveal something verifiable about the reality of the world, particularly about the reality of Clothes. But Carlyle's reader has immediate, strong indicators that the Editor has started from the wrong assumption, notably the irony established through the gap between the seriousness of the Editor's process and the mundanity of much of the language. The Editor's exaltation of scientific progress contains clunky, sardonic language like "the Torch of Science has now been *brandished and borne about*," and "innumerable Rush-lights, and Sulphur matches, kindled therat, are also glancing in every direction, so that not the *smallest cranny or doghole…"* (3). From the start, Carlyle sets the reader up to recognize this disconnect for the entirety of *Sartor Resartus*: the Editor attempts to crunch *Die Kleider* into an epistemological box into which it does not fit, another piece of knowledge amongst pieces of knowledge. He

attempts to use *Die Kleider* to add to the landscape of knowledge, but *Die Kleider* resists this; it refuses to land on conclusions and to close itself interpretively enough to take on this status.

From the first page, Carlyle flags the dubious relationship between the text on which the Editor works and the Editor, whose self-appointed task at the beginning of *Sartor* is to serve "as a mid-wife to help bring forth the reader's own understanding of the Clothes Philosophy"; an incongruity between his approach and the materials with which he works continues throughout *Sartor* (Baker 220). In the first chapter, Teufelsdröckh sends the Editor his presentation copy, and by the second paragraph of the second chapter, forebodingly titled "Editorial Difficulties" (so early in the book!), the Editor has already asked himself:

> How might this acquired good be imparted to others, perhaps in equal need thereof; how could the Philosophy of Clothes, and the Author of such Philosophy, be brought home, in any measure, to the business and bosoms of our own English nation? For if new-got gold is said to burn the pockets till it be cast forth into circulation, much more may new Truth. (8)

The Editor has already determined, at this stage, what his task will be: he will attempt to give his English reader access to the German philosophy of Teufelsdröckh. The passage has religious overtones, suggesting the Editor's role as the writer of a new Gospel, the bringer of new "good news," suggested by "acquired good," "new-got-gold," and especially "new Truth." The question of how to impart not only the Philosophy of Clothes, but also the "Author of such Philosophy" to the "business and bosoms" of his English readers further suggests that the Editor's task is, in part, a theological one. In this

paragraph in particular, the Editor's Germanic practice of capitalizing the first letters of nouns lends itself to the religious interpretation by making both "Author" and "Philosophy" into proper nouns like "God" and "Bible," particularly given that "author" serves as a common epithet for God. The theological task that the Editor takes on, however, misses the point conveyed by the most Carlylean portions of Diogenes Teufelsdröckh's clothes philosophy: the need to work and engage in a spiritual practice in the absence of Christianity; the need to make the world anew rather than simply add another brick into a preexisting intellectual structure.

The Editor's goal of delivering the "good news" of the Clothes Philosophy is clear; how to go about doing this is a more difficult question. The Editor's theological task, along with the intellectual tradition in which he's placed *Die Kleider*, makes biographical detail essential to the book he'll write. Without biographical documents that, at least in his estimation, will be essential additions to the knowledge provided in *Die Kleider*, he decides he cannot carry it out. When Hofrath Heuschrecke promises the Editor that he'll "furnish the requisite Documents" and suggests that the Editor "undertake a Biography of Teufelsdröckh," the Editor suddenly decides to plow ahead. He does so, without the previously wished-for biographical documents, for the entirety of Book I of *Sartor*, though he claims that no one can expect that "with all our writing and reporting, Teufelsdröckh could be brought home to him, till once the Documents arrive," a suggestion that indicates the Editor's relative mistrust of hermeneutics (21).

When the documents finally arrive, disappointing the Editor, he makes an important shift from the earlier belief that he cannot complete his work without the biographical documents to a resigned acknowledgment that he will continue the

supposedly impossible project anyway, although the quality of such a project will be significantly compromised based on the empirical framework in which he has situated Teufelsdröckh's, and consequently his own, work:

> if the Clothes-Volume itself was too like a Chaos, we have now instead of the solar Luminary that should still it, the airy Limbo which by intermixture will farther volatilise and discompose it! . . . Biography or Autobiography of Teufelsdröckh there is, clearly enough, none to be gleaned here: at most some sketchy, shadowy, fugitive likeness of him may, by unheard-of efforts, partly of intellect partly of imagination, on the side of Editor and of Reader, rise up between them. Only as a gaseous chaotic Appendix to that aqueous-chaotic Volume can the contents of the Six Bags hover round us, and portions thereof be incorporated with our delineation of it. (60)

Despite worrying that the biographical documents might actually work to the detriment of his exegesis of the Clothes Philosophy ("which by intermixture will farther volatilise and discompose it"), the Editor doggedly pursues his plan to use the six paper bags in support of his critical work; the next chapter of *Sartor Resartus* after "Prospective"—when the Editor receives the documents—is "Genesis," the story of the beginning of Teufelsdröckh's life.

The orderly narrative that the Editor craves, however, is impossible. Anne K. Mellor, whose reading of *Sartor Resartus* in *English Romantic Irony* has been highly influential, including to this chapter, argues that the editor "necessarily fails" because he "tries to force Teufelsdröckh's thoughts and expressions into a coherent, logical system":

> Carlyle thus shows us simultaneously the mind's rage for order; the need for a more vital metaphorical language; the failure of all human attempts to fit the infinite abundance of life into a single system; and especially the ultimate inability of even the most richly symbolic language to comprehend life or to express accurately the nature of its incomprehensibility. (121)

As I have argued above, I agree that the Editor's approach to Teufelsdröckh, so out of line with the raw materials that Teufelsdröckh has provided for him, is doomed from the start. The Editor's approach to Teufelsdröckh's material attempts to categorize it in the same epistemic category as the theory of gravitation or Lagrange's planetary calculations. Carlyle, having established the Editor's craving to force Teufelsdröckh's text into a form satisfying from an empiricist epistemological position, demonstrates the essential inflexibility of such a position throughout *Sartor*. Carlyle's Editor notably cannot recognize his own complicity in the intellectual tradition that Carlyle rails against through Teufelsdröckh's *Die Kleider* as:

> Logic-choppers, and treble-pipe Scoffers, and professed Enemies to Wonder; who, in these days, so numerously patrol as night-constables about the Mechanics' Institute of Science, . . . who often, as illuminated Sceptics, walk abroad into peaceable society, in full daylight, with rattle and lantern, and insist on guiding you and guarding you therewith, though the Sun is shining, and the street populous with mere justice-loving men . . . The man who cannot wonder, and who does not habitually wonder (and worship), were he President of innumerable Royal Societies, and carried the whole *Mecanique Celeste* and *Hegel*'s *Philosophy* and the epitome of all Laboratories and Observatories with

> their results, in his single head,—is but a Pair of Spectacles behind which there is no Eye . . . Thou wilt have no Mystery and Mysticism; wilt walk through thy world by the sunshine of what thou callest Truth, or even by the hand-lamp of what I call Attorney-Logic; and 'explain' all, 'account' for all, or believe nothing of it?" (52-3)

Carlyle demonstrates the inflexibility of the type of thinking he rails against here through an Editor who presents this passage without an iota of self-awareness. The Editor has earlier positioned *Die Kleider* itself within the tradition of the institutions the fictional Teufelsdröckh calls up here; he has also expressed frustration at the possibility that everything in *Die Kleider* cannot be accounted for (the Editor's concern that Teufesldrockh might be pulling his leg and the passage about the floating rafts both come to mind). Yet because the Editor's methodology does not include interpretive work, it also prevents him from questioning the very assumptions that have led to that refusal of interpretive work. Carlyle shows us a cyclically impoverished way of thinking that compromises the Editor's ability to respond to Teufelsdröckh's text. Instead, the Editor becomes more and more frustrated by his project as he continues to pursue documentation. He wants clarity in what knowledge is firmly tethered to reality. He wants to decide what's a matter of knowing, even as Teufelsdröckh goads him (through the documents and by disappearing) into taking understanding as a matter of faith, or perhaps of meaning-making.

This desperation for documentation is apparent not only in the Editor's initial reluctance to begin work on his book about *Die Kleider* without the coveted biographical documents, but also in his reaction to their arrival. Yes, he's disappointed, but, in his

frequently used royal "we," he still asserts that "we shall perhaps see it our duty ultimately to deposit these Six Paper Bags in the British Museum," and as such, that "farther description, and all vituperation of them, may be spared." While he claims that they're deserving of "vituperation," the Editor also aims to preserve them in the British Museum, implying that the British Museum would take an interest in them enough to add them to its collections. And though he might pooh-pooh the documents and complain about their chaotic nature, he still gives them a special kind of epistemic authority (that inclusion in the British Library both rests upon and contributes to). He'll do his best to use their contents in his own work (though he remains doubtful of their effectiveness), and rather than describe them to the interested reader, he sees fit to defer to their authority in terms of the content they contain. The reader who wants to know what's in the paper bags must make a visit to the British Museum to see them. The Editor, who has set out to create a secondary text that can facilitate the spread of knowledge, undermines his own project by refusing to more fully describe the contents; in doing so, he implies that only the primary sources will really do.

The Editor's fanatical trust in verifiable historical fact is strong enough that, in one instance in which Professor Teufelsdröckh maligns Hofrath Heuschrecke, the Editor sees fit to reprint his insults, justifying printing something that will negatively affect the Hofrath[46] as follows: "What the Hofrath shall think of this, when he sees it, readers may wonder: we, safe in the stronghold of Historical Fidelity, are careless" (20). What the English reader can gain from Professor Teufelsdröckh's complaints about Hofrath

[46] This is no small matter, as the Hofrath is certainly a public figure, much as Carlyle's friend Francis Jeffrey, after whom Rodger L. Tarr speculates that Hofrath Heuschrecke might be modeled.

Heuschrecke is unclear; they don't seem to serve a particularly salient hermeneutic role. But the Editor is, we can see in this instance as in others, resistant to a hermeneutic role. Better an irrelevant fact found in a primary document than a relevant one made secondary. And though the most salient definition in the word "careless" here is to be free from care, the *OED* lists an alternate definition during the time of *Sartor*'s publication—"Not taking due care, not paying due attention to what one does, inattentive, negligent, thoughtless; inaccurate"—that, although certainly not intended by the Editor himself, would also seem to apply. Stripped of its non-restrictive clause, the sentence reads simply, "We are careless," and highlights the moral ambiguity of the Editor's position even if he doesn't believe it to be so; his unyielding reliance on "Historical Fidelity" and refusal to engage in interpretation blinds him to the double meaning of his own sentence.

The Editor's epistemic frustration is, of course, worsened by his wondering whether Teufelsdröckh might have been so unkind as to purposefully cultivate uncertainty. He strives to maintain his faith in Teufelsdröckh's sincerity even as he's confronted with evidence that the Professor is perhaps a little disingenuous:

> The Professor, in whom truly we more and more discern a certain satirical turn, and deep undercurrents of roguish whim, for the present stands pledged in honour, so we will not doubt him: but seems it not conceivable that, by the 'good Gretchen Futteral,' or some other perhaps interested party, he has himself been deceived?" (68-69)

As the Professor "stands for the present pledged in honour," the Editor overrides his own doubts about the "satirical turn" and "deep undercurrents of roguish whim" he finds in Teufelsdröckh. Only a few pages later, however, he's flipped his interpretation and

becomes more outright in his condemnation of Teufelsdröckh's perceived shenanigans, only to then renege on that condemnation:

> Thou rogue! Is it by short-clothes of yellow serge, and swineherd horns, that an infant of genius is educated? And yet, as usual, it ever remains doubtful whether he is laughing in his sleeve at these Autobiographical times of ours, or writing from the abundance of his own fond ineptitude. (73)

The Editor pauses to consider the fact that Teufelsdröckh seems to be playing on his own obsession with verifying, and at times overvaluing, individual details of the Professor's biography. The Editor's lack of imagination leads to his inability to interpret Teufelsdröckh's childhood clothes consistently with his present-day understanding of the adult Teufesldrockh, and the dissonance he experiences leads him to question not his own interpretation of unknowability as an evil (or his interpretation that the "short-clothes" are unsuited for a genius philosopher), but rather Teufelsdröckh's social motivations (is he somehow mocking the rest of us?).

In his concern over Teufelsdröckh's truthfulness, the Editor shows both admiration for Teufelsdröckh (the claim he can't wrap his head around is that such a genius would have been brought up in so humble a way) and frustration with him; this is one of many illustrations of the Editor's negative affective states arising out of his tendency to carry his positive ones too far. Take the Editor's work practices, for example: Rob Breton has claimed that Carlyle insisted upon "the ideal worker as able to exist on the non-economic features of work alone," with work in *Sartor Resartus* in particular "principally treated [. . .] as personal therapy," noting that Teufelsdröckh uses it as an "answer to his own spiritual problems, such as depression and doubt" (10, 37). What

Breton does not focus on is the fact that Carlyle does not just use Teufelsdröckh as a positive example of this model of work; he also uses the Editor as a foil to Teufelsdröckh, an example of the way that working in the wrong way can lead to negative outcomes. In the Everlasting Yea, Teufelsdröckh, citing Goethe, specifies that "Doubt of any sort cannot be removed except by Action" as a preface to his admonition to "Produce! Produce!" The relief of doubt, however, must come experientially, and the answer to the removal of certainty through action is internal:

> The Situation that has not its Duty, its Ideal, was never yet occupied by man. Yes here, in this poor, miserable, hampered, despicable Actual, wherein thou even now standest, here or nowhere is thy Ideal: work it out therefrom; and working, believe, live, be free. Fool! The Ideal is in thyself, the impediment too is in thyself: thy Condition is but the stuff thou art to shape that same Ideal out of: what matters whether such stuff be of this sort or that. (145)

The Editor's approach to work functions in opposition to the spiritual evolution Carlyle represents for Teufelsdröckh in "The Everlasting Yea" insofar as the Editor continues to create friction between his own work and the circumstances in which he does that work, wishing for alternative documents and refusing his hermeneutic capabilities (an impediment in himself).

The Editor works to the point that his health begins to decline, following Teufelsdröckh's dictate to "Produce! Produce!" a bit too literally through "incessant toils and agitations" that cause him to lose "some fraction of his natural sleep" and leave him with "an inflamed nervous-system" (60). Though the Editor refuses to fully acknowledge his plight, insisting that he undergoes such pains while "Patiently [. . .] dismissing all

anger," his declining health presents a contrast to the view of "Work for its own sake" or "personal therapy" proposed by Teufelsdröckh and attributed by Breton to Carlyle himself (Breton 40). Far from being therapeutic in nature, the Editor's work drives him to experience both a deep anxiety about that work's value and a marked physical deterioration; he becomes less well in every way. Despite this, however, the Editor continues on, unaware of the fact that his decline indicates that his own approach to work is out of line with the spiritual success of "The Everlasting Yea," and continuing to praise Teufelsdröckh's spiritual journey as documented in that chapter (145).[47] This maps onto the idea of the Editor's work as theodicy insofar as his assumption is that action—in this case intellectual labor—can help to relieve the doubt that he feels about Teufelsdröckh's status as author qua God. But contrary to the Editor's assumptions, the more the Editor attempts to act, the worse his doubt becomes.

While the Editor remains ambivalent in the feelings he has toward Teufelsdröckh throughout the book, his unceasing work on Teufelsdröckh's manuscript, motivated by his admiration of Teufelsdröckh's arguments about work's value, threatens more and more to transform that admiration into deep anxiety bordering on paranoia.[48] Eve

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[47] Of course, one might also choose to interpret the Editor's comments about his health as a sort of work-ethic humblebrag, in line with comments Stanley Fish makes in his hilarious and bracing essay, "The Unbearable Ugliness of Volvos," about academics' tendency to turn suffering into a badge of honor:

> If one listens to academics, one might make the mistake of thinking they would like their complaints to be remedied; but in fact the complaints of academics are their treasures, and were you to remove them, you would find either that they had been instantly replenished or that you were now their object. The reason that academics want and need their complaints is that it is important to them to feel oppressed, for in the psychic economy of the academy, oppression is the sign of virtue. (105)

When the Editor "dismiss[es] all anger" while continuing to remind his reader of the struggle he has in reworking *Die Kleider*, he also shows a tendency toward making a virtue of "oppression."

[48] The fact that the Editor's suspicions might seem to be correct in no way changes the significance of his paranoid interactions with the text, since the Editor is never able to fully

Kosofsky Sedgwick has discussed the consequences of paranoia in contemporary literary studies, and parts of her discussion apply to the Editor's state, particularly her description, following Silvan Tompkins, of paranoia as a "strong affect theory," defined as such because it somewhat paradoxically grows in strength as it racks up failures to protect us from experiencing negative affects (134-35). Paranoia does this by preying upon people's general goal of minimizing negative affect and maximizing positive affect; although itself a negative emotion, paranoia promises the forestalling of negative *surprise*, and thus promises relief from future negative emotion; "the mushrooming, self-confirming strength of a monopolistic strategy of anticipating negative affect can have, according to Tomkins, the effect of entirely blocking the potentially operative goal of seeking positive affect" (136). In *Sartor Resartus* paranoia is able to operate on and through the Editor because of his unease over the certainty and verifiability of both biographical facts and Teufelsdröckh's odder and more extreme positions as expressed in *Die Kleider*.

The shift from seeking positive affect to forestalling negative affect isn't a unilateral one—even late in *Sartor Resartus* the Editor still expresses exuberance over Teufelsdröckh's genius and the quality of his philosophical text—but the Editor does trend toward interpreting Teufelsdröckh's aims more darkly as time moves on. Take two passages, one near the beginning of *Sartor*, one near the end, describing the chaotic nature of *Die Kleider*. Early on, the Editor describes *Die Kleider* as "a very Sea of Thought; neither calm nor clear, if you will; yet wherein the toughest pearl-diver may

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confirm them, and his need for empirical proof of his interpretations doesn't stop with the content of the documents themselves, but rather extends to his interpretations of human actions apart from those documents. That is, without being able to confirm his suspicions, the Editor must play them out indefinitely upon the text he edits.

dive to his utmost depth, and return not only with sea-wreck but with true orients" (8). The metaphor of "a very Sea of Thought" suggests chaos, but also a book teeming with life, a mixture of "sea-wreck" and "true orients," with the emphasis on the last-mentioned "true orients." In invoking the "pearl-diver" the Editor also takes some measure of responsibility for finding these "orients" onto himself and his reader; Teufelsdröckh has provided the treasure if only we can be diligent and clever enough to find it. Nearer to the end, however, the Editor takes a much sourer view of things:

> Of Professor Teufelsdröckh it seems impossible to take leave without a mingled feeling of astonishment, gratitude, and disapproval. Who will not regret that talents, which might have profited in the higher walks of Philosophy, or in Art itself, have been so much devoted to a rummaging around lumber-rooms; nay, too often to a scraping in kennels, where lost rings and diamond-necklaces are nowise the sole conquests? Regret is unavoidable; yet Censure were loss of time. To cure him of his mad humours British Criticism would essay in vain: enough for her if she can, by vigilance, prevent the spreading of such among ourselves. What a result, should this piebald, entangled, hyper-metaphorical style of writing, not to say of thinking, become general among our Literary men! as it might so easily do. Thus has not the Editor himself, working over Teufelsdröckh's German, lost much of his own English purity? Even as the smaller whirlpool is sucked into the larger, and made to whirl along with it, so has the lesser mind, in this instance, been forced to become portion of the greater, and, like it, see all things figuratively: which habit time, and assiduous effort, will be needed to eradicate. (215)

In contrast to the earlier thrill of possible discovery of "true orients" in the "Sea of Thought," the Editor here manifests a deep suspicion bordering on dread at the possibilities that lie in store for the reader of *Die Kleider*. That "Sea of Thought" has turned into "lumber-rooms" or "kennels," in which "lost rings and diamond necklaces are no-wise the sole conquests." Whereas the earlier quotation emphasizes the possible treasure and downplays the "sea-wreck," by the end of the Editor's work the mysterious junk that accompanies the rings and necklaces as "conquests" has been shifted into the final, emphasized position.

Even more important is the Editor's shift in understanding the potential consequences for the reader of Teufelsdröckh's book. Again, according to Eve Sedgwick, "the mushrooming, self-confirming strength of a monopolistic strategy of anticipating negative affect can have, according to Tomkins, the effect of entirely blocking the potentially operative goal of seeking positive affect." The Editor's shift into a paranoid attitude toward Teufelsdröckh is highlighted in his shift from seeking positive affect to attempting to keep negative affect at bay, or at least from coming as a surprise. In the earlier quotation, the reader or Editor acts as a "pearl-diver" who has the agency to find treasure without much fear of the "sea-wreck" that might be useless, but certainly won't cause harm. The later quotation reflects a sense not of hopefulness, but of foreboding, both through the mysteriousness of what one might find besides rings and diamond necklaces, and with the warning to "British Criticism" not to attempt to cure Teufelsdröckh of his twisted style of writing, but to protect "herself": "enough for her if she can, by vigilance, prevent the spreading of such among ourselves." The Editor exclaims over the potential bad results of such spreading, though he doesn't get specific

about what all of the effects would be: "What a result, should this piebald, entangled, hyper-metaphorical style of writing, not to say of thinking, become general among our Literary men! as it might so easily do." While a shift in British Criticism toward a "piebald, entangled, hyper-metaphorical style" isn't equivalent to a shift to negative affect, the connection between the obfuscation of Teufelsdröckh's style and the Editor's epistemologically derived anxiety is a tight one throughout. Instead of describing a reader or critic who might experience the thrill of discovery, then, the Editor has begun to describe one who must take care to protect themself from the possibility of taking on a style so closely linked to negative affect.

This anxiety over the impact that Teufelsdröckh's work will have on himself and "British Criticism" more broadly provides an opportunity to circle back to my long-neglected opening to this chapter, namely Deidre Lynch's work in *Loving Literature* showing the fraught nature of loving literature and the appeal of alienation from that literature[49]. The Editor's "mingled feeling of astonishment, gratitude, and disapproval" speaks to Lynch's argument that, beginning in the late eighteenth century, the gratitude that a reader might feel toward an author began to seem burdensome insofar as it might be interpreted as a debt owed to the author and therefore as a type of mastery of the author over the reader. The Editor ends his edition of *Die Kleider* with almost the exact mix of feelings Lynch proposes, as is demonstrated to some extent in the final portion of the long quotation I've included above:

[49] Sianne Ngai, writing on the "interesting" as a category, points to the German Romantics, and Friedrich Schlegel in particular, perpetuated "a shift from enthusiasm to detachment as the proper stance for writers and critics to adopt toward literature," further supporting Lynch's diagnosis of the changes taking place in the period (126).

> Thus has not the Editor himself, working over Teufelsdröckh's German, lost much of his own English purity? Even as the smaller whirlpool is sucked into the larger, and made to whirl along with it, so has the lesser mind, in this instance, been forced to become portion of the greater, and, like it, see all things figuratively: which habit time, and assiduous effort, will be needed to eradicate. (215)

If the Editor feels "astonishment, gratitude, and disapproval," the overlapping portion of the Venn diagram we might draw of his multiple emotions might well include Lynch's gratitude tinged with mastery. Of course, in Lynch's argument, starting in the eighteenth century, the very fact of gratitude implied mastery; the feeling of gratitude and the feeling of being mastered are felt by and presumably primarily incited by the receiver of the book, the reader. In Lynch's description, the reader feels both the gratitude and the sense of being mastered without any input from the author, and what might carry the illusion of a two-way exchange is actually one-directional, with all of the emotional response to the "relationship" between author and reader lying in the reader. Carlyle structures the relationship between the Editor and Teufelsdröckh in the same way. The Editor produces his own gratitude derived from his admiration of certain of Teufelsdröckh's ideas, and from what he believes is the originality of Teufelsdröckh's argument in a world already flooded with knowledge. But he also produces his own feeling of being mastered by Teufelsdröckh: his own inability to tolerate indeterminacy in the quality of the evidence Teufelsdröckh has given him.

This feeling of mastery both causes, and is caused by, the Editor's task becoming a type of theodicy; that is, like in Lynch's argument, it's caused by the combination of

gratitude and a perceived hierarchy between himself and Teufelsdröckh. Throughout *Sartor*, we watch him grapple not only with Teufelsdröckh's text, but with his attitude toward Teufelsdröckh as author. Again, the author of an ordinary theodicy must find a way to show that "for every actual evil found in the world, one can describe some state of affairs that it is reasonable to believe exists, and which is such that, if it exists, will provide an omnipotent and omniscient being with a morally sufficient reason for allowing the evil in question" (Tooley). The Editor, on the other hand, must show that for every empirical-epistemological discrepancy in Teufelsdröckh's text (or, more generally, the potential fact that Teufelsdröckh may have purposefully compromised the available historical evidence), an author of genius with an intellectually sufficient reason for sowing uncertainty also exists. The problem for the Editor is that though he struggles throughout his book, he is, in the end, insufficiently imaginative to see that Teufelsdröckh's sowing of uncertainty is, in fact, the work of an agent with an intellectually sufficient reason for the uncertainty he fosters. George Levine has argued along these lines:

> By the device of the six paper bags laden with fragments of Teufelsdröckh's autobiography, [Carlyle] can eschew narrative even when the materials he presents are narrative in form. Conscious that he must pick and choose among the facts in any case, Carlyle is careful to let the reader know that he is not pretending to describe the full 'cause-and-effect' sequence of his hero's life, but rather that he is treating the whole symbolically to help him express the extraordinary complexity of connections and the ultimate miracle of experience. (*Sartor* 139)

If Carlyle's focus is "treating the whole symbolically" rather than as "cause-and-effect sequence," in order to emphasize "the extraordinary complexity of connections and the ultimate miracle of experience," then within the framework of the text, Teufelsdröckh (voicing Carlyle's own position) meets the criteria for an author of genius with an intellectually sufficient reason for sowing uncertainty because he prizes "the ultimate miracle of experience," which can be represented only by neglecting "cause-and-effect sequence." It is the Editor's consistent misrecognition of this goal—inevitable due to his consistent shying away from hermeneutic practice—that causes him to fail again and again as he tries to force a set of symbolic documents into an orderly, verifiable narrative.

There is a tendency, caused at least in part by the Editor's failing at his task, for contemporary critics to align themselves with Carlyle by pointing out the rather glaring flaws in the Editor's position. In this chapter I have participated in this trend by pointing out the implausibility of the Editor's desire to create an epistemological Eden by verifying each and every fact he encounters. As we see above, Anne K. Mellor points to the way the Editor consistently tries to shape the unshapeable into a logical system, and in doing so achieves only his own exhaustion. As I have already argued, part of Carlyle's signaling of the Editor's intellectual impoverishment is the mismatch between the Editor's positioning of Teufelsdröckh's (and therefore his own) work within an intellectual context and the appropriate context for that work. This mismatch creates tension throughout the text, with the Editor consistently struggling with the question of what kind of book he's writing in real time. But though later critics have tended to align themselves with Carlyle's position through critique of the position represented by the Editor, they've also had difficulty classifying *Sartor Resartus*, echoing Gerry Brookes at

the beginning of *The Rhetorical Form of Carlyle's* Sartor Resartus: "The lack of simple sequence and order in the arrangement of materials and the presence of sustained fictions in *Sartor* make it difficult to decide whether the book is a novel or other form of narrative fiction, some form of essay or work governed by ideas, or a mixed mode of questionable unity" (1). In an oft-cited article by George Levine, "*Sartor Resartus* and the Balance of Fiction,"[50] Levine demonstrates that in *Sartor* Carlyle embraces fictionality, but chooses to "eschew narrative," enough so that "much of the material in the first and third books of *Sartor* is interchangeable" (139, 149). In the introduction to California's edition of *Sartor*, Rodger L. Tarr puts it simply by declaring that to accomplish his task, Carlyle "fuses genre to genre" (xxii).

More recent critical conversations—particularly those about the epistemological status of the archive and the work done within it—have also reproduced struggles that we find Carlyle warning us against through his Editor character. We find hints of this continued preoccupation in James Treadwell's complaints about critics' fixation on *Sartor Resartus*'s Editor, and their tendency

> to repeat the Editor's anxiety over hermeneutic activity itself. Many critics accordingly interpret the book as an attempt to redefine acts of reading. The argument has been brought to its logical extreme with a claim that Sartor is the opposite of a dogmatic text: it not only contains no definite meaning, but intimates the impossibility of texts having a fixed meaning at all . . . Teufelsdröckh and Die Kleider are all but forgotten in this extreme enthusiasm for understanding the work of writing in terms of critical acts. (n.p.)

[50] This article also appears as the first chapter in Levine's *The Boundaries of Fiction: Carlyle, Macaulay, Newman*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1968.

Treadwell attributes this tendency to "Sartor's most immediate problems—its extravagant style and its ironic method" rather than the way that the Editor's particular preoccupations have continued to haunt critical work, but I would argue instead that critics' preoccupation with the Editor stems from a tension in our own work that creates the desire to align ourselves with Carlyle by distancing ourselves from the intellectual failures illustrated through the Editor character, even as we continue to engage in similar critical practices.

Excising uncertainty becomes, for the Editor, and I would argue for some literary critics, a kind of unhealthy religious exercise. Religious faith tends to promote a greater degree of belief in an external locus of control—a belief that external factors are primarily responsible for many of the outcomes we experience in our lives. The increased psychological well-being that tends to come with healthy religious faith can temper the otherwise negative mental health outcomes for people who see their lives as largely determined by outside forces—those with an external locus of control rather than an internal locus of control, which means that "that person attributes success to his or her own efforts and abilities" (Joelson). But in general people with an external locus of control fare worse: "people with an external locus of control are more likely to experience anxiety" and depression (Joelson, Prociuk et. al.). Those with an internal locus of control are, on the other hand, "less likely to . . . show high levels of psychological stress" (Joelson). Because he treats his work on Teufelsdröckh's text as a religious exercise and Teufelsdröckh as a secular God, the Editor shows an external locus of control—at least with regard to his work—that is demonstrated in statements like this one: "what reader expects that, with all our writing and reporting, Teufelsdröckh could be

brought home to him, till once the Documents arrive?" (21). The Editor assumes that, no matter his own level of skill or investment in his work, he cannot do an adequate job, an assumption backed up by his larger assumption that that knowledge is pre-existing—something that he must find or unearth—rather than something made. Without the capacity to create knowledge himself, the Editor finds himself at the mercy of Teufelsdröckh; his success or failure depends upon outside factors. In the case of those with a healthy religious faith, trust in God often makes up for this external locus of control, turning the potential feelings of hopelessness into more positive emotions because it reduces the pains of uncertainty (much like how they are reduced for someone with an internal locus of control who might think they have meaningful control over their own destiny). But the Editor, unsuccessful in his theodicy, never trusts in Teufelsdröckh's motives, and suffers the consequences to his physical and mental health as a result. Much of his initial pleasure in Teufelsdröckh's work turns to anxiety, suspicion, and doubt.

The Editor's sense of an external locus of control comes from his dependence upon Teufelsdröckh, and that dependence comes from his approach to his own work. Taking an empirical-epistemological position in relation to work that could be approached from a hermeneutic mindset leads to helplessness: he cannot accomplish the work he wants to accomplish without the intervention of outside forces: he needs the key players and documents to appear before he is able to act, and when they never do appear, he flounders, never finding a true sense of agency. In what follows, I trace the presence of an external locus of control in relation to knowledge in a number of corners of literary criticism. Most notable, perhaps, are critical conversations about practices that very

closely mirror Carlyle's Editor figure's accumulative logic. Conversations about these practices, and their relationship to archives like the Editor's six paper bags, are ongoing, as, for instance, in a special issue of *J19* published in 2014 that dedicates itself to the status of the archive, and in so doing takes up many questions relevant to the Editor's plight. One of the contributors, Brian Connolly, argues in his essay "Against Accumulation," that the same techniques that Carlyle critiques through the Editor in *Sartor Resartus* are fully present in literary studies and other humanities disciplines:

> Recently, a confluence of technology, framework, and new practices of reading have resulted in a newfound fascination with an empirical orientation toward evidence, one frequently offered as a substitute (or antidote) for now supposedly "tired" hermeneutics. The digitization of archives (and the attendant quasi-disciplinary formation we have come to call digital humanities) and global (and other extranational) studies have engendered an accumulative logic toward evidence and the archive. Supposedly, the more evidence we have the better, whether through the multiplication of pieces of evidence or the ability to search keywords across a previously unimaginable number of sources. (172)

Especially telling is Connolly's identification of a "newfound fascination with an empirical orientation toward evidence . . . as a substitute (or antidote) for now supposedly 'tired' hermeneutics." The aversion to hermeneutics that Connolly diagnoses closely resembles the Editor's tendency to view the need for hermeneutics as a symptom of an evil in the world: uncertainty.

And of course, Carlyle's Editor writes in the time period that we tend to associate with "the empirical, positivist search for reality." As Connolly puts it: "Since at least the

nineteenth century, the archive has been figured as the repository of documentary evidence. It was the institutional site where evidence could be found to document the veracity of historical narratives" (172). The Editor, thinking he sees in the idea of the archive the potential for perfect historical fidelity in his work, cannot but be disappointed in the six paper bags he receives in place of one. Today's archives, even brick and mortar ones, rarely resemble the Editor's six paper bags in terms of their physical qualities (the inside of which the Editor characterizes as "miscellaneous masses of Sheets, and oftener Shreds and Snips"), but at times their organizational logic feels little more comprehensible, at the moment of accessing the archive, than would the signs of the southern zodiac.[51] Still, the growth of digital archives has seemed in many cases to further the attitude that "the more evidence we have the better, whether through the multiplication of pieces of evidence or the ability to search keywords across a previously unimaginable number of sources." It's as though the Editor's unsuccessful theodicy has been revisited in the digital age; the difference between the current approach and the Editor's is that, whereas the Editor, with his imperfect evidence, oscillates between trying to understand whether Teufelsdröckh has been purposefully deceptive and wishing to remedy the problems of evidence—the evil itself—contemporary archives give the illusion of the potential to completely eliminate the evil by providing immediate access to all of the best possible evidence and eschewing the question of whether historical

[51] I was grateful for the plentiful resources available to me at University of California Santa Cruz, with its impressive collection of Carlyle's letters and manuscripts. The letters, however, are organized chronologically by the date they were acquired, not by the date written, and Jane's letters appear in the midst of a box of Thomas's, making this first-time archive user very grateful that Jane's much neater handwriting practically announced itself after hours hunched over Thomas's tiny script with a magnifying glass and camera.

documents might not epistemologically ground hermeneutic knowledge and instead mask its difficulties.

There's overlap between the Editor's approach to evidence and contemporary historicist approaches, but Carrie Hyde and Joseph Rezek argue that the contemporary moment goes further by treating texts primarily as historical objects rather than as repositories of meaning:

> literary critics in the age of historicism tend to privilege exemplarity, valuing texts for the evidence they offer about the past. The term 'archive' is more suited to this purpose than 'art,' because it borrows the epistemic authority associated with the discipline of history (postmodern critiques notwithstanding). (Hyde and Rezek 156)

Literary critics' turn back toward empiricism has led them to begin considering literary texts themselves as historical objects. Of course, to some extent this is a rather simple statement of one of New Historicism's most central assumptions—that literary texts should be treated as part of, not apart from, other forms of discourse—and is neither surprising nor new. But the pairing of the phenomenon pointed out by Conolly and this longer-lasting facet of criticism pushes contemporary criticism past the position represented by the Editor in terms of an avoidance of hermeneutics in favor of historical fact.

But Hyde and Rezek, while they acknowledge a lasting preference for historicism, also point out the potential of that preference to fade, acknowledging a "mounting fatigue with historicism in general and New Historicism in particular [, and] the proliferation of new models of reading, born from such fatigue" (156). Fatigue with New Historicism is

related to the fatigue with ideology critique I've discussed earlier in this dissertation insofar as exhaustion with both is drawn in part from what these critics perceive as these methods' inability to be "hospitable to surprise" ("Manifesto"). Rita Felski's *The Limits of Critique* draws attention to a growing dissatisfaction with critique, which, according to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's assessment, works tirelessly to forestall negative surprise while neglecting the cultivation of positive affect. Heather Love, writing in response to Felski's book in *PMLA*, nicely summarizes the lines along which Felski's readers might split. Quoting Felski's assertion that we should "make peace with the ordinariness of daily life," Love notes that "those who think we should be at war with the world, and that now is not the time to give up any weapons in our arsenal" might understand it her position as "capitulation," but while Love does manifest some sympathy for that position, she also highlights that this commitment to ordinariness "is the cornerstone of Felski's realist, pragmatic criticism and the signature of her respect for a world that exceeds our knowledge of it" (Felski 31, "Critique" 369).

Love's praise and Felski's "respect" point toward a comfort in not knowing that rejects the anxiety over the unknown or hidden knowledge we might understand as the affective force in criticism that motivates Felski's book. Felski, as read by Love, settles into the world's unknowability quite comfortably. What I have perhaps implied, in once again using Rita Felski's book as an example, is binary opposition between critique's over-dependency upon sussing out an underlying truth and Felski's zen-like calm in the face of uncertainty, but as I argue in my chapter on Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads,* I do not think that critique must necessarily involve such an over-dependence or entail the negative affective consequences that Felski assumes. Still, it's reasonable that

some versions of symptomatic reading, with its tendency to treat "elements present in a text" as if they are "symbolic of something latent or concealed" might differ methodologically from the Editor of *Sartor Resartus*'s work, but might still share with it a "strong affect theory" of paranoia, and, relatedly, the assumption that knowledge is something waiting to be discovered (hopefully before any bad surprises hit) (Best and Marcus 3).

A hunger to eliminate uncertainty in some corners of literary criticism derives at least in part from the broader, ongoing institutional "crisis" for literary studies. Neither New Historicism nor ideology critique need necessarily function in their neurotic accumulative and paranoid forms, but the history of the discipline's place within a larger social and academic context has created the impulse to eliminate uncertainty as a way to justify the discipline's continued validity. Gerald Graff posits in *Professing Literature* that literary studies' long-term failure to grapple with the question of what constitutes literary knowledge in the face of external (i.e. institutional demands to demonstrate the value of literary studies to students and to society more broadly) and internal (i.e. theoretical differences between literature professors) pressures. Speaking of a conflict between the "critics" and "scholars" of the mid-twentieth century, Graff notes that "An opportunity had been missed," because "the struggle between critics and scholars might have enabled literary studies to clarify what they stood for, even if this should prove to be nothing more coherent than the manifest divisions within a literary culture that no longer agreed on what 'literature' was or on its social function or on how it should be read" (208). And because of that missed opportunity, "the story of academic literary studies in America is a tale not of triumphant humanism, nationalism, or any single professional

model, but a series of conflicts that have tended to be masked by their very failure to find visible institutional expression" (14). The consequences of this failure, a failure to find a consensus about what constitutes knowledge in literary studies (even consensus over an inability to reach consensus), has created a diminishment of the potential for literary studies to claim for itself even the cultural capital necessary to maintain respect from other disciplines and university administrations, and perhaps more importantly, to continue attracting undergraduate students who cannot risk the possibility that their degrees won't help them both develop the skills and acquire the cultural capital needed for their later career success. According to John Guillory, "it is this crisis—the long-term decline in the cultural capital of literature—which gives rise to the canon debate"—a debate that was desperately needed but which also further splintered the knowledge base of literature departments (x).

A canon struggle also lives at the heart of *Sartor Resartus*: just as literary criticism once relied upon a set of canonical texts in which to anchor its creation of knowledge and therefore its disciplinary status, so too does Carlyle's Editor work to establish a set of facts and events in Teufelsdröckh's life that can be considered "sacred" text and anchor his work on the seemingly anchorless *Die Kleider*. Among the numerous definitions of the word "canon" is the one referring to lists of accepted texts; the *OED* lists both the secular and religious meanings together, acknowledging that a "canon" can be "the collection or list of books of the Bible accepted by the Christian Church as genuine and inspired. Also *transf.*, any set of sacred books; also, those writings of a secular author accepted as authentic" ("Canon"). The Editor manages to bring together the portions of the definition that occur before and after the semicolon by treating a

secular author as a God throughout his text, and it is in part these exercises in defining the canon (and these exercises are closely tied to the concept of theodicy as I have been discussing it)—his obsession with what can be considered "genuine" or "authentic"—that ultimately prevents his success at creating a coherent text from the sources he has been given, and thus means that the knowledge conveyed by his book is itself splintered and incoherent. And so with our updated version of what John Guillory called "the canon debate," in which we try to make up for the cultural capital loss of the literary canon (along with cultural capital loss due to other factors) and institutional shifts away from humanistic forms of knowledge through a turn toward enormous digital archives with the "renewed empirical orientation toward evidence" that Connolly identifies in "Against Accumulation."

And something similar happens when, as Deidre Lynch identifies, gratitude is tinged with mastery; when external empirical practices (over-reliance upon the evidence of the archive) replace internal hermeneutic practices (the close reading that Franco Moretti, for example, claims is outdated and unrepresentative in *Distant Reading* and other recent writings); and when institutional and social forces devalue humanistic ways of knowing, leaving literary scholars feeling, to some degree at least, that they're subject to the whims of University administrations and an economy that increasingly values skills taught in STEM fields. The negative effects of an external locus of control might be amplified in cases where scholars doubt the efficacy of literature and literary criticism to make an impact on an unjust world:

> We find ourselves the heirs of Michel Foucault, skeptical about the very possibility of radical freedom and dubious that literature or its criticism can

> explain our oppression or provide the keys to our liberation. Where it had become common for literary scholars to equate their work with political activism, the disasters and triumphs of the last decade have shown that literary criticism alone is not sufficient to effect change. (Best and Marcus 2)

If the possibility of effecting political change fosters a sense of agency for some literary critics, Best and Marcus cut it off at the source by articulating a stance that undermines the claims of "literary scholars [who] equate their work with political activism." As they undermine these claims they do offer alternative opportunities for literary critics to find purpose in their work, but these feature the type of empiricism that Connolly protests against in "Against Accumulation" and that might foster the lack of agency and subsequent deterioration imagined by Carlyle in *Sartor Resartus*:

> New media create new forms of knowledge, and digital modes of reading may be the inspiration for the hope that we could bypass the selectivity and evaluative energy that have been considered the hallmarks of good criticism, in order to attain what has almost become taboo in literary studies: objectivity, validity, truth . . . To adopt some of the methods of science to the study of culture is not to say that scientists would be the better students of it, for scientists not only have little interest in studying cultural objects but also lack training in how to study them qualitatively. We are not envisioning a world in which computers replace literary critics but are curious about one in which we work with them to expand what we do. (17)

I in no way object to the use of scientific findings and at times methods in literary criticism, but I do object to establishing scientific methods and goals as primary,

"bypass[ing] the selectivity and evaluative energy" that literary critics generally bring to bear on texts in the service of the goal of "objectivity, validity, [and] truth." This vision, in which the introduction of scientific methods, rather than working alongside more subjective methods, pushes them aside, threatens to remove critical agency by disallowing models of knowledge that emphasize creation, synthesis, and interpretation. In short, it assumes that knowledge is always present before a critic engages with it, not, at least partially, made by the critic. Less critical agency tends to mean more critical anxiety and even depression, a situation that's exacerbated by the fact that negative feelings and moods are contagious (Joiner).

Carlyle emphasizes through his Editor the dissatisfaction and even deterioration that come through a relentless refusal to both engage hermeneutically with a text that's just about begging to be approached hermeneutically and to live with the uncertainty that often comes with such hermeneutic endeavors. In recent years, perhaps in part as a result of the breakdown of cultural capital previously attached to literature and literary criticism, literary critics have taken on approaches to literary criticism that mirror the approaches Carlyle critiques through the Editor: approaches that attempt to outlaw uncertainty through paranoia (some versions of ideology critique) and through accumulated evidence. If, as according to Andrew Elfenbein, *"Sartor* prophetically imagines as fiction the role in the academy that later Victorian sages would actually play as charismatic critics," it is also prophetic in the history of profession in another sense: in its form it predicts the ongoing epistemological struggle of literary criticism, and the continued anxiety that comes of it in our relationships to the authors we study (*Byron* 99). Rita Felski perhaps provokes us to lessen the intensity of such a struggle through an

increased acceptance of the unknowability of the world, while Gerald Graff has argued that the struggle should be not only embraced but also given institutional form and incorporated into undergraduate curriculum in a meaningful way. Best and Marcus turn toward a scientific model of knowledge, while Brian Connolly, Carrie Hyde, and Joseph Rezek reject such a model. What kinds of epistemological models will continue to develop remains to be seen, but the experience of pleasure in literary criticism both as a practice and as a profession, depends upon these models incorporating critical agency into them. That is, the verbs that underlie each concept of literary-critical knowledge must not just allow for, but expressly encourage, differences in critical knowledge, whether one thinks of that knowledge as selected, created, produced, made, assembled, developed, or any other number of actions that change our relationship with a world that, in Heather Love's words, "exceeds our knowledge of it."

The Spectre of Uncertainty in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and Literary Criticism Now

In this chapter I bring together two parallel moments—moments are separated by more than two hundred years, but strikingly similar nonetheless, and, I would argue, both crucial to the history of literary criticism. The first moment is one many readers experienced in response to Ann Radcliffe's device of the "supernatural explained" in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Contemporaneous readers in particular expressed dismay at the moment that seemingly supernatural occurrences are explained and the resulting disenchantment of the world of the novel. The second moment is documented in an article version of Mary Poovey's talk, originally given at the British Women Writers Conference, "Recovering Ellen Pickering." In the talk, Poovey documents her time recovering the work of nineteenth-century author Ellen Pickering and goes on to give a dazzling interpretation of one of Pickering's novels only to reveal near the end that she does not think "Ellen Pickering's works should be reprinted, canonized, and taught" (448). In the article Poovey then documents the audience's dismay, indeed outrage, at the idea that Poovey's brilliant performance and Pickering's status as a forgotten woman writer don't warrant the steps toward canonization that Poovey pooh-poohs.

In both of these cases, the displeasure of the audience comes from the sudden dissipation of of pleasurable, soothing epistemological fantasies. In the case of Radcliffe's audience, the disenchantment is twofold: first, the fantasy of a return to an enchanted world by way of the novel has been burst, and second, Radcliffe's fictional techniques force this disenchantment out into the real world: in fact, not only does Radcliffe deem the enchanted world of the supernatural unconvincing, but she also

questions the efficacy of the epistemological strategies for knowing the world offered by Enlightenment empiricism. Through the medium of the gothic novel, Radcliffe's techniques are able to push a relatively broad swath of middle-class readers to process and come to terms with the period of intense uncertainty in which they lived (and the world's relentless uncertainty more broadly), disrupting the fantasy that any epistemological strategy can provide a comfortable certainty about the world. Poovey, writing academic criticism for a niche group, pushes her audience to come to terms with the epistemological uncertainty of literary texts as objects of study and the broader uncertainty and discomfort that has persisted in literary criticism as a result. Like Radcliffe's fantasy, the fantasy in Poovey's case is decidedly one of certainty: for a segment of her audience there seems to be certainty that the work of any woman writer we encounter is a worthy object of recovery and certainty that we are able to look clearly at our object of study in any case—a fantasy that helps protect our sense of the validity of our claims to knowledge. Poovey points out what seems to her to be fundamental indecision about the role of literary criticism as her audience splits its concerns in two. Some talk attendees ask questions that suggest that literary criticism is about the preservation of literary value—that it takes as fundamental "the notion that literariness or 'greatness' (however that is defined) resides *in* the text itself, and that, by extension, literary critics discover, recover, and protect this quality from the ravages of time" (451). Some of her audience demonstrates, conversely, a greater openness towards acts of critical ingenuity—an ability for "a theoretically informed ingenuity [to] take marginal fragments of a text and build from them a timeless city of gold" (451). Poovey's anxiety lies in the gulf between assumptions of value located within a text and those located

within critics and their interpretive acts; her anxiety arises from the fact that these questions about value necessarily raise difficulties with literary texts' status as objects of study about which we may or may not be able to produce knowledge deemed acceptable in the modern academy.

Radcliffe reminds us that an epistemologically stable vantage point is only accessible within fiction. She does so through a formal rift (that could perhaps also be described as a kind of long-form dramatic irony) between the novel's characters—who consistently fail to discover and correctly organize the knowledge they need about the world—and the novel's reader—who eventually finds that all of the novel's central questions have been neatly answered. This split establishes that only through the figure of the author-god, who has control over the details of the world she creates, can we reach certainty about the nature of events and phenomena that impact our lives. Radcliffe's audience may not have enjoyed such a lesson from a novel that initially seemed to promise an escape from the uncertainties of the present through an enchanted fictional world. The scholars Poovey speaks to at the British Women Writers Conference also betray the desire to escape uncertainty and the same dismay at receiving a lesson that indicates that they can't truly do so. For many, there is a pleasurable certainty in the status of literary texts as objects that comes with literary recovery projects and their methodological accompaniments. Poovey destabilizes that certainty by questioning where literary value is located—whether the audience's sense of the text's value comes from the text or from her work as a critic. The problem of the location of textual value opens upon the broader, and for Poovey, more troubling, issue that I mentioned above: that of the status of literary-critical knowledge—whether it is knowledge discovered about a pre-

existing object or created by an ingenious professional critic. What both of these positions have in common is that they largely focus on either object or subject while sidestepping descriptions of the dynamic relationship that exists between the two. Critics might attempt to do this by proposing methodologies that allow us to see the text more objectively (thereby eliminating the subject) or, less frequently but still importantly (given the magnitude of importance of the work of Stanley Fish) to eliminate the text as object in favor of a focus on the subjectivity (however reined in by culture and training) of the critic. Those who hold these positions might do worse than consulting Radcliffe when it comes to fundamental uncertainty of criticism's excluded middle—the dynamic relationship between subject and object and the inherent uncertainty at the core of such a relationship. Radcliffe demonstrates that the only methodological intervention that can excise uncertainty is the putting on of the role of author-God, a role that creates only fiction, never knowledge. Unlike Radcliffe, we do not have the option of creating certainty by playing author-God, and so need to navigate the uncertainty of the relationship between subject and object, self and world (or self and text). In this chapter, after providing a reading of Radcliffe, I will consider ways critics have avoided navigating this uncertainty by defining their way out of the problem (defining what kind of object a literary text is and/or what kind of subject a critic should be) and why these attempts are inevitably unsatisfying, and then propose that new methodologies be built around the assumption that knowledge in literary criticism is at least partially procedural rather than propositional. While doing so does not have the potential to solve the "crisis in the humanities"—there are too many social and institutional factors that an

epistemological intervention can't touch—it may intervene on the methodological booms and busts that lead to disappointment and stoke feelings of crisis amongst literary critics.

The Explained Supernatural

Many critics consider the "explained supernatural" as the main driver of epistemological tension in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. For a long time, everyone loved to hate Radcliffe's use and repetition of this device: Katherine Ding reports that it disappointed many of Radcliffe's early readers, who could "appreciate her narrative effects only when the causes of terror remain inaccessible," and who directed their most "frequent and vehement complaints" against the "disappointingly ordinary causes" of the events they had previously supposed were supernatural in origin (550). Terry Castle documents the continuation of this practice in relatively recent criticism, objecting to the way that critics use Radcliffe's famous device "to demonstrate the superiority of the critic to this notoriously 'silly' writer and to have done with Radcliffe as quickly as possible. Even among admirers of Gothic fiction, the clumsy device of the 'explained supernatural' is often taken as the final proof of Radcliffe's irredeemable ineptitude and bathos" (121).[52] Radcliffe's stock has risen considerably in the years since Castle wrote her landmark essay, and as both she and Ding consider, there's room for understanding *Udolpho* in epistemologically richer terms.[53] Ding does so by arguing that

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[52] See also Barbara M. Benedict, who in *Framing Feeling* responds to critics who see a "contradiction between Radcliffe's ostensible neoclassical ideology lauding reason, caution, and control, and her practice of describing the vacillations of doubt, fancy, and fear" by pointing out that the seeming contradiction is a feature, not a flaw, insofar as part of Radcliffe's work in *Udolpho* is "bridging opposing ideologies" (173).

[53] Other critics who have compellingly addressed the epistemological ambiguities in *Udolpho* include, but are not limited to: David Durant in "Aesthetic Heroism in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*," Diana Long Hoeveler in *Gothic Riffs*, Deidre Lynch in "Gothic Fiction," and Anne McWhir in "The Gothic Transgression of Disbelief."

the "explained supernatural" plays an important role in the development of the novel, and in the rise of realist fiction in particular. Castle, on the other hand, resists the natural/supernatural binary[54] as articulated by earlier critics, instead demonstrating how these categories bleed into one another as the source of hauntings shifts from "the vulgar apparitions of folk superstition" to the kinds of "ghosts" that are "subjective, delicately emotional in origin, the subtle protrusions of a yearning heart"—Freudian ghosts (123).

I also want to characterize *Udolpho* in epistemologically richer terms, but unlike Ding I do not take it for granted that belief in *Udolpho* is built entirely of sensations and heightened emotions. While Ding considers the fictional devices Radcliffe uses to solicit unwarranted belief from her readers, I read *Udolpho* as confronting the epistemological problems of both excessive sensibility (which attaches itself to an unquestioned belief in supernatural causes for unexplained phenomena) and Enlightenment rationality (which attaches itself to emotionally detached empirical strategies for providing explanations for such phenomena), ultimately rejecting the idea that epistemological strategies will reliably produce justified belief. Many of the "mysteries" in *Udolpho* are not mysteries that lie on the border of the natural and the supernatural (that is, they're never even mistaken for supernatural events), and no matter what the suspected nature of an event, characters respond to having incomplete information in a variety of ways. There's a range of responses, from the servant Annette, whose excessive emotional responses tend to shut down her capacity to reason about the events of the novel, to Emily, who attempts to

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[54] Castle characterizes the critical tendency to read *Udolpho* along this binary, which maps onto the types of places and events with which critics concern themselves in the novel: "Many modern critics implicitly treat the fictional world as though it were composed of two ontologically distinct realms—one the extra-ordinary, irrational, irruptive, and charismatic (that of Montoni and Udolpho), the other ordinary, domestic, and uninteresting" (121-22).

check the emotional responses that would shut down her reason, to the Count de Villefort, who maintains a Baconian trust in empirical evidence. While I certainly will not argue that Radcliffe represents these methods of justifying belief as being of equal value, all these characters are ultimately helpless at generating knowledge and accurate interpretations of the world around them—a world that sometimes stubbornly refuses to yield information. Only through the structure of fictionality, in which the relationships between characters have been engineered so as to allow for the resolution of each mystery in its turn, do the characters gain the answers they seek and the ability to properly interpret what has happened to them. Without Radcliffe playing author-God by distributing answers amongst those in a position to reveal them, the characters whom these mysteries most affect would persist in their misinterpretations.

The explained supernatural may have irked Radcliffe's readers, with even Terry Castle copping to the fact that Radcliffe's are "admittedly intrusive rationalizations," but as I suggest, one might argue that at a time rife with uncertainties, the intrusiveness of Radcliffe's technique draws attention to the difference between fiction and real life (120). While keeping one's cool, thinking rationally and investigating empirically might eventually pay off in Radcliffe's novel (at the least by dispensing with the need for some very unpleasant emotions), the text's aggressive invocation of its own fictional status indicates that we need not read this novel as endorsing any particular epistemological position. Only in the novel can such epistemological and interpretive errors be corrected—can people be restored to a state of relatively perfect knowledge of the world and their place within it—and this because objects that steadfastly refused to come into view and be properly examined are, through the intervention of the novel's form, finally

brought into view, often across distances of both space and time. What is disconcerting about the "explained supernatural," or indeed any of the explanations for the mysteries in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, then, is that it rather throws this fact in the faces of its readers, forcing them to confront the relentless inevitability of error and the world's stubborn withholding of evidence, an inevitability made worse by the confusion that comes with political upheavals like those of the French Revolution and the British government's response to the changes it brought in both France and Britain.

I'd like to start with an example from *Udolpho* that brings many of the mysteries together. In the course of hearing Sister Agnes/Signora Laurentini's story, there comes a crucial moment, before Laurentini has delivered up full the narrative, in which Emily tries to piece together the outlines of her story:

> At this moment, the terrible spectacle, which Emily had witnessed in the chamber of that castle, occurred to her, and she shuddered, while she looked upon the nun—and recollected her late words—that 'years of prayer and penitence could not wash out the foulness of murder.' She was now compelled to attribute these to another cause, than that of delirium. With a degree of horror, that almost deprived her of sense, she now believed she looked upon a murderer; all the recollected behaviour of Laurentini seemed to confirm the supposition, yet Emily was still lost in a labyrinth of perplexities, and not knowing how to ask the questions, which might lead to truth, she could only hint them in broken sentences.
>
> 'Your sudden departure from Udolpho'—said she.
>
> Laurentini groaned.

> 'The reports that followed it,' continued Emily—'The west chamber—the mournful veil—the object it conceals!—when murders are committed——.' (648)

Despite the fact that Emily now has much of the available evidence regarding the events in which Laurentini has been involved, she makes mistakes in connecting the dots between pieces of evidence and in determining which of them should be included. Through a process of association she connects Laurentini and her portrait at Udolpho to the object behind the veil—still supposed by her to be a corpse—apparently inferring that Laurentini murdered the person whose body is now concealed by the Udolpho veil, then fled Udolpho after having committed the murder. The object behind the veil, while relevant to Emily's experience of Udolpho, is irrelevant when it comes to Laurentini's crime, and by accidentally including a piece of evidence that ought to have been left out, Emily makes a mistake. Granted, she's unsure of the conclusions she comes to, and given that Laurentini is then right in front of her, wishes to ask her for direct confirmation of her guesses. When that doesn't come, Emily is left wondering:

> That in the dying nun she should have discovered Signora Laurentini, who, instead of having been murdered by Montoni, was, as it now seemed, herself guilty of some dreadful crime, excited both horror and surprise in a high degree; nor did the hints, which she had dropped, respecting the marriage of the Marchioness de Villeroi, and the enquiries she had made concerning Emily's birth, occasion her a less degree of interest, though it was of a different nature. (650)

Without the knowledge that Laurentini was in love with the Marquis de Villeroi, Emily doesn't connect the dots between Dorothée's suspicions of foul play in the Marchioness's

death and Laurentini's anguish over her past crime. Emily separates these two circumstances in her mind, suspecting (as indirectly as possible) that her father had a romantic relationship with the Marchioness based on his request that Emily burn his papers, his desire to be buried near the Marchioness, and his emotional response upon hearing that he was in the vicinity of Chateau Le Blanc.

When Emily finally returns to the convent to hear the rest of the story from the abbess, a curious metafictional moment occurs. The abbess tells Emily the story "off stage"—the reader isn't privy to details of the conversation—while the reader has access to a different, more detailed version from the narrator:

> As the narrative of the abbess was, however, deficient in many particulars, of which the reader may wish to be informed, and the history of the nun is materially connected with the fate of the Marchioness de Villeroi, we shall omit the conversation, that passed in the parlour of the convent, and mingle with our relation a brief history of LAURENTINI DI UDOLPHO. (655)

The narrator informs the reader of the details of Laurentini's story, occasionally specifying the points in the story that the abbess also relates to Emily, along with Emily's reaction to them. But some points in the story contain no such references to Emily, and so are quite possibly meant to be the portions that the abbess is (understandably) "deficient" in relating. One of these portions reveals the nature of the object behind the veil. Emily believes it to be a corpse, but it turns out to be "a waxen image," a *memento mori* installed in the castle of Udolpho long before the novel's action and covered over in the intervening years. While the reader finds this out, it's not clear that Emily ever does. The narrator doesn't reference the abbess including that information in her tale, at least, and

it's unclear how the abbess would have known that information given that, as I mentioned above, it's irrelevant to Laurentini's story.

The gap between Emily's newfound understanding and the reader's is more than a simple instance of dramatic irony. Radcliffe fails to invent an excuse for the narrator's knowledge of the extra information (the narrator hasn't, for instance, spoken to another nun who knew the true story, nor is the tale told, as it is in other of Radcliffe's novels like *The Italian*, as a history given by someone not involved in, but still privy to, the events in question). The lack of backstory for the narrator's extra knowledge calls attention to the omniscient narrator as a fictional device, and to the entire story's status as fiction. This calling of the reader's attention is relatively overt, using direct address to give the reader access to information that no character in the novel has access to, and dismissing the abbess as a less-than-competent narrator of key events because of her status as a fictional character.

If the "supernatural explained"[55] seems intrusive to readers, that's because it is; but that intrusiveness can be considered as a feature and not a flaw, a flagging not just of the natural underpinnings of seemingly supernatural events, but also of the divergence between reality and fiction, as Emily, who admittedly has had most of her questions cleared up, continues without key pieces of information (and thus with continued misinterpretation) allowed to the reader of the novel. It may seem a bit backward that in this interpretation of the novel, Emily's experience represents the experience of real life

[55] Many of the incidents I discuss in *Udolpho* go beyond the "supernatural explained" as a device, in part because what I am arguing here is that Radcliffe explores mysteries and explanations more broadly. What Radcliffe does throughout *Udolpho,* including in incidents that use the device of the "supernatural explained," is depict events that elicit irrational responses and unreflective beliefs in one particular type of explanation that are later explained in more rational terms.

while the flesh and blood reader's experience represents the experience of fiction. But in terms of the work of interpretation, Emily's access to evidence and use of that evidence in interpreting her own life serves to model the kind of haphazard interpretive work we often do in real life; the metafictional moment I've been discussing flags the role of fictional devices in resolving the mysteries of the text, and so serves to remind us that only in fiction do mysteries get consistently and satisfyingly (or dissatisfyingly if you've got a penchant for the supernatural) explained.

Other moments in the novel flag its fictionality, though none quite as spectacularly as the moment when the narrator reveals Laurentini's backstory. Still, these moments support my claim that Radcliffe is concerned with contrasting fictionality with reality—with exploring what's possible in fiction versus what's possible in life. On a couple of occasions, for instance, Montoni ironically refers to Emily as a "heroine," as when he tells her she "speak[s] like a heroine," and uses this epithet to transition into a threat: "we shall see whether you can suffer like one" (381). And, more subtly, there are hints at the possibility of Emily sliding into psychosis, such as a moment when Emily compares her experience in Udolpho to her earlier life:

> So romantic and improbable, indeed, did her present situation appear to Emily herself, particularly when she compared it with the repose and beauty of her early days, that there were moments, when she could almost have believed herself the victim of frightful visions, glaring upon a disordered fancy. (407)

While not nearly as explicit as Montoni's use of the word "heroine" to describe Emily, Emily's consideration of the possibility that she is experiencing psychosis,[56] imagining

[56] Though, as Castle argues in her characterization of the "spectralization of the other," "it is precisely the distinction between so-called normal and psychotic patterns of belief that has

the "frightful visions" that she has up to now presumed were real, has parallels to the reader's absorbed state. Emily's self-reflection might well call an absorbed reader to attend to the status of her own absorption: to what degree has the reader forgotten herself enough to treat these "frightful visions" as real? Andrew Elfenbein has written that, even as literary scholars resist treating characters as "real people," the impulse to treat them as such is a sticky habit even after reading ends and offline interpretation begins: "no matter how often we stress such a point, both students in literature classes and many critics find that it never fully takes hold. For all our efforts, readers persist in treating literary characters as if they were people they had met . . . Readers respond to literature as if it is real life because many activities that go into understanding literature are the same ones required to understand daily events" (*Gist* 59). Read with this in mind, Emily's question about her own grounding in reality mirrors the reader's difficult task of recollecting Emily's fictional status (and that of the rest of the novel).

The closing paragraphs of the novel are, aside from the tale of Laurentini, the most interesting metafictional moment; they call attention to the act of narration and to the narrator's "awareness" of the reader. Taken at face value, the final paragraphs seem to reinforce clichés of fiction: first, the moral lesson of punishment for those who commit evil acts and rewards for those who are good, particularly those who are good in the face of injustice and suffering:

> O! Useful may it be to have shewn, that, though the vicious can sometimes pour affliction upon the good, their power is transient and their punishment certain; and

become increasingly confused since the eighteenth century. The everyday has come to seem fantastic; and the fantastic more and more real" (137). No matter the level of difficulty in sorting this out, however, the awareness of the possibility of confusing these categories, and the process of at least attempting to sort out the difference, is what's important for my purposes.

> that innocence, though oppressed by injustice, shall, supported by patience, finally triumph over misfortune! (672)

In this penultimate paragraph, the narration modulates between understatement and hyperbole. The opening phrase, "Useful may it be to have shewn" is painfully uncertain. It could be fairly restated as something along the lines of: "If someone were in fact able to demonstrate this moral (which might have happened here), it might be a useful moral to have demonstrated." Neither the achievement of the goal nor its worthiness is stated with conviction. This undercuts the hyperbole of the next portion, in which the moral is actually stated along with the overblown assurance that for those who are "vicious," "their power is transient and their punishment certain."

Understood from within a secular society, the statement that the "vicious" will get their just desserts might well read as wildly naïve. Understood within the context of a religious society, in which an omnipotent God has the ability to mete out appropriate punishments, whether now or later, it might be read straightforwardly. Radcliffe, however, writes during a period of transition, a phase in a broad social process of secularization dominated by what Charles Taylor calls "Providential Deism." According to Taylor, the process of disenchanting the world of spirits, ghosts and other forces was an important one in the larger emergence of a secular society. The "discipline of disenchantment" is rigorously adhered to by Radcliffe through the use of the explained supernatural. But the process of secularization goes beyond this disenchantment, and Radcliffe, largely through the character of St. Aubert, represents other elements of Providential Deism in *Udolpho*. Importantly, "once disenchantment has befallen the world, the sense that God is an indispensable source for our spiritual and moral life

migrates. From being the guarantor that good will triumph, or at least hold its own, in a world of spirits and meaningful forces, he becomes [. . .] the essential energizer of that ordering power through which we disenchant the world, and turn it to our purposes" (Taylor 233). Once God cannot be "the guarantor that good will triumph," it's difficult to see how the guarantee can be made good on. Moreover, given the fact that *Udolpho* was published during the Reign of Terror and the broader uncertainties and ongoing debates about goodness, viciousness, and justice brought on by the French Revolution,[57] it's particularly difficult to read the promise of evildoers being punished entirely straightforwardly.

The second of the two paragraphs imparts the second lesson about what fiction can do; that is, that it can comfort and provide escape for those who are suffering:

> And, if the weak hand, that has recorded this tale, has, by its scenes, beguiled the mourner of one hour of sorrow, or, by its moral, taught him to sustain it—the effort, however humble, has not been vain, nor is the writer unrewarded. (672)

This paragraph is weaker in its irony, but some of its halting language stands out. At the end of a behemoth of a novel, the image of a "weak hand" is pleasantly ambiguous. We can read it metaphorically, as the conventional humility of a woman write presenting her work to the world, or we can read it literally, in which case the heft of the novel we've just read belies the supposed weakness of the hand. The same goes for the idea of

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[57] Government might be the secular answer to God as guarantor of justice, but during the French Revolution one method for fighting ideological battles was to destabilize governmental claims to legitimacy. Thomas Paine, for instance, did this by "represent[ing] the *ancien regime* in Britain and elsewhere as an entirely fictive system of government and society, entirely without substance because entirely the creature of the imagination. Hereditary monarchy, he proclaimed, 'is a thing in imagination', 'a thing as various as imagination can paint. It has none of the stable character that government ought to possess.' The crown too was a metaphor, or rather a metaphor for a metaphor. The title of the aristocracy were equally ideal, imaginary entities" (Barrell 20).

beguiling "one hour of sorrow" with a four-volume novel, one that Coleridge complained "sacrifice[s] excellence to quantity" and is "lengthen[ed] out . . . for the sake of filling an additional volume" (369-70). And finally there's the litotes at the end of the sentence: a conventional enough device that could be read fairly straightforwardly as meaning that the writer will be rewarded, but that, when grouped with language layering uncertainty upon uncertainty, reads more ambiguously. All of these destabilize the trite lesson of the paragraph. This dovetails with the overall goal of using *The Mysteries of Udolpho* as a means of exploring the possibilities and conditions of certainty. *Udolpho* undermines the first of these lessons by marking the places where fiction and reality diverge—it flags the ways that fiction allows for epistemological stability through access to knowledge rarely available in real life. And, while *Udolpho* often does allow, rather spectacularly in fact, for the kind of absorption that might help "beguile" not one, but many hours of "sorrow," it also contains moments, like when the narrator diverges from the abbess's version of events, that break that absorption through metafictionality.

If the form of *Udolpho* itself sets the reader up to feel the full weight of epistemological instability, incidents within the novel also draw attention to the stubbornness of reality in the face of human efforts at knowledge. For the sake of brevity, I will consider just one such set of incidents: those related to the mystery of what is haunting the chambers of the late Marchioness of the Chateau Le Blanc. The mystery of this haunting brings out a range of approaches to knowledge. A substantial number of the servants are immediately convinced, based on partial evidence, that a ghost is responsible. The Baron de St. Foix, true to his name, claims faith in the supernatural from the beginning, and while not as easily spooked by the supposed apparition as the Count's

servants, he exhibits the same stunning confirmation bias in light of the events in the chambers. Emily positions herself in the middle; after she and Dorothée first encounter something, she considers alternatives to believing it to be a supernatural something, suggesting that perhaps someone "had followed them into the rooms, with the design to frighten them" (536). Still, she continues to struggle with "a superstitious awe" until the mystery is later resolved. The final position, and the one I'll follow most closely here, is that of the Count de Villeroi, who resists turning evidence into belief for longer than anyone else in the castle, and who employs the most effort gathering more evidence.

The Count de Villeroi, particularly compared with the other characters in the novel, remains calm and deliberate; in attempting to solve the mystery of the chambers, he treats the mystery as a methodological question, using practices of 18th-century natural philosophy like repetition, testing alternative hypotheses, and cultivating emotional detachment[58] in himself (and attempting to do the same for others). He has near-absolute confidence that this proto-scientific method will quickly expose the source of the mystery and put all questions about it to rest, a confidence that ultimately is undermined by his inability to discover the root cause of the events without the first-hand knowledge of Ludovico. While the uncertainty surrounding Ludovico's disappearance does eventually get cleared up, my argument isn't that mysteries don't sometimes get cleared up, or that Radcliffe doesn't think so herself. Rather, I am arguing (and Radcliffe demonstrates) that methods aren't guarantees; the Count has absolute faith in his

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[58] Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison stress that practices like these that would later allow for scientific objectivity existed long before the heyday of objectivity in the second half of the nineteenth century (28-29). I bring up objectivity now because it will become important in the second half of this chapter in my discussion of contemporary literary criticism. So while "objectivity" would not have been a fully-fledged "epistemic virtue" at the time Radcliffe wrote *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, some of the Count's practices do map onto the issues I discuss later.

techniques for discovering the cause of the mystery, but it's not his methods that yield the knowledge being sought.

One of the Count's methods is repetition. After Dorothée and Emily encounter something in the closed-off chambers, he welcomes Ludovico's proposal to keep watch in the chambers on the grounds that it will help disprove what many in his household too quickly believe: that a supernatural being haunts the chambers. Perhaps the Count's embrace of Ludovico's plan is drawn from his desire to quiet the family more than from his own curiosity about the events of the earlier night, but after Ludovico disappears, the Count is motivated to unravel the mystery by keeping watch himself, and expresses a dual motivation for his efforts:

> I am harassed and perplexed by the confusion, into which my family is thrown by their foolish superstition. Idle reports are floating round me, which I can neither admit to be true, or prove to be false; and I am, also, very anxious about the poor fellow, Ludovico, concerning whom I have not been able to obtain information. (570)

Both when Ludovico keeps watch and the Count subsequently follows suit, the Count expresses confidence that the act of keeping watch—of close, careful observation—will solve the mystery. When Ludovico volunteers to keep watch, the Count assumes that the fruit of close observation will be nothing at all, which will allow "the rooms [to] be thrown open" to further demonstrate the non-phenomenon. When the Count decides to keep watch, he expresses even more confidence and remains both skeptical and relatively emotionally detached: "Wherever the mystery rests, I trust I shall, this night, be able to detect it. You know I am not superstitious" (571).

When Ludovico disappears, the overwhelming consensus among members of the Count's household is that a supernatural being is the cause of his misfortune. The Count, however, refuses to accept this version of events, instead testing a number of other hypotheses:

> The Count now checked his amazement, considering, that Ludovico might have left the chambers, during the night . . . Yet, if this had been the fact, the man would naturally have sought society, and his fellow servants had all declared they had not seen him; the door of the outer room also had been found fastened, with the key on the inside . . . and all the outer doors of this suite were found, on examination, to be bolted and locked, with the keys also within them. The Count, being then compelled to believe, that the lad had escaped through the casements, next examined them, but such as opened wide enough to admit the body of a man were found to be carefully secured either by iron bars, or by shutters, and no vestige appeared of any person having attempted to pass them: neither was it probable, that Ludovico would have incurred the risque of breaking his neck, by leaping from the window, when he might have walked safely through a door. (561)

Having considered a number of possibilities and then ruled them out, the Count next conjectures that "Ludovico must have quitted these rooms by some concealed passage," but though the Count has in fact guessed correctly, he is unable to find the passage by which Ludovico really did escape, and he also finds it "inexplicable" that Ludovico would have left through such a passage, even if he could find it (562).

Notably, these passages of text register the Count's effort to remain emotionally detached: he "checked his amazement" upon not finding Ludovico in the room and, when after a bit more searching "his amazement did not admit of words," the Count refuses to give in to that amazement and steadfastly "returned once more" to continue his investigation (562). The Count attempts to discover the source of the mystery by carefully observing the state of the room and the possible means of escape, and by regulating his emotional response to the situation enough to be able to reason carefully about what might and might not have been possible. Yet despite the fact that the Count—with his careful observation and reasoning, as well as his attempt at repetition of Emily and Dorothée's original experience in the chambers—represents Enlightenment empiricism, he is nearly as helpless in discovering the truth as Baron St. Foix, who is "strengthened in all his former opinions" about the supernatural and who attributes a supernatural cause to all of the chambers' unexplained phenomena. The Count, without yielding to excessive sensibility or superstition, and having employed epistemologically respectable means of discovery, is as in the dark as any of his servants.

In *Udolpho*, Radcliffe sets up her readers to feel the full weight of epistemological instability. She does so through form, as metafictional moments highlight the contrivances that bring about solutions to the novel's mysteries, and she does so through events in the novel, particularly through the Count's investigation of the Chateau Le Blanc apartments, in which the reader witnesses the stubbornness of reality in the face of human efforts at knowledge. The epistemological positions that Radcliffe tries out are ultimately found wanting insofar as the interpretations and procedures they suggest are shown to be wrong or inadequate. Radcliffe does not simply return to Enlightenment

values, but instead leaves us to understand that our relationship to reality is fundamentally uncertain—no epistemological stance can guarantee that our beliefs and efforts at observation will translate to stable knowledge of the world.

Contemporary Criticism and the Critic-Text Relationship

Turning to the current state of contemporary literary criticism, I would like to consider the wreckage that similar epistemic problems have created in the field of literary studies. I turn to "Recovering Ellen Pickering," the article whose affective moment helps open this chapter, shortly. For now, I'll briefly consider another article by Mary Poovey, "The Model System of Contemporary Literary Criticism," in which she posits that literary criticism has organized itself around the metaphor of the "organic whole." Because of the borrowing of this metaphor from biology, Poovey argues, "the disciplinary specialization that grouping categories facilitated enhanced practitioners' ability to develop specialized techniques and instruments, to produce systematic knowledge, and thus to gain the kind of social credibility that eventually made the professionalization of biology and literary criticism possible" (410). Establishing an organizing metaphor helped (and helps) literary criticism to epistemologically ground itself, licensing the creation of specialized methodologies and a separation between professional critics and amateur readers, both of which were necessary for literary criticism to be taken seriously within the academy.

But even with the metaphorical grounding of the "organic whole," literary studies continues to be epistemologically haunted, often finding itself unable to justify its methods and results in terms of the modern university's expectations of what it means to produce knowledge, as Poovey discusses in "Recovering Ellen Pickering." Although

Poovey's talk focuses most immediately on the problems that accompany the project of recovering work by marginalized groups of writers, its broadest concerns are those of this chapter: mainly, the relationship between literary texts and literary critics, which Poovey would hope to be a "dynamic" one in which the tools of literary criticism come to bear on a present, literary text. But for all her exploration of this relationship, Poovey remains haunted at the end of the article, citing

> our profession's current indecision about the role and nature of literary criticism. If literary criticism is the servant of literature, then doesn't literature have to be worthy of our reverent attention? If literary criticism is no more (or less) than an exercise of creative ingenuity, then how can it purport to produce knowledge about literary texts or anything else? Behind these two questions lie even larger epistemological questions that concern the changing nature of (what counts as) objectivity in the modern academy and the degree to which literary criticism claims either to be objective or to describe objects that have essential properties like 'literary value.' These are troubling questions because they implicitly jeopardize the foundational claims of our entire discipline. They are troubling questions because none of us have adequate answers, and because the theoretical tools we have developed and the institutional status our discipline has acquired have made these questions not only imaginable but virtually inescapable. (451)

Part of what troubles Poovey here is exactly how we might construct the "dynamic" relationship between text and critic that I mentioned above. Without being able to locate value within a text, what, she wonders, is literary criticism doing? If all the value is brought by the critic's "creative ingenuity," what on earth are we producing knowledge

about? And, finally, she grapples with what she calls the "larger epistemological questions," those that grapple with the place of literary criticism within the broader institution of the "modern academy," within which discounting the need for an object about which to produce knowledge is something of a nonstarter.

Poovey is not the only critic who has grappled with this anxiety in recent years. A relatively common refrain has been that an overemphasis on critical ingenuity, and the corresponding undervaluation (or destabilization) of the object of study, has led to problems that threaten not only interpretive humanities disciplines, but also the broader world. Bruno Latour, though not a literary critic, struck a nerve with many literary critics with "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?" Written during the Bush administration, those "most depressing of times" according to Latour, the article chronicles social problems that have since worsened: citing the "backlash" against climate science, Latour bemoans the fact that his methods and those of others like him, with which he attempted to "*emancipate* the public from prematurely naturalized objectified facts," have turned into weapons in the hands of the Right (226-27). Peter Brooks, writing in 2008, cites as an example of the ethical problems that critical methods can help create "the infamous August 1, 2002, memorandum from Assistant Attorney General Jay S. Bybee to Presidential Counsel Alberto Gonzales." The memorandum "uses at least five different dictionaries, of varying dates, to select definitions of words it can then bend to its point, which is essentially that nothing is 'torture' short of death-inducing pain." Brooks knows that "we may uneasily sense" in this bending of language to inhumane ends "a tricksy free play of the signifier of the sort that literary critics and philosophers are sometimes accused of sponsoring." That is, literary critics and philosophers, having asserted the

constructed nature of facts, and having pried language apart from the objects to which it refers, have paved the way for the effective weaponization of language as a means to deplorable ends. What brings these two examples together is that prying apart of reality and language: a world in which language, rather than existing in a dynamic relationship in which it both constitutes and is constituted by reality, can be manipulated to fabricate reality almost from whole cloth.

Stanley Fish's work in *Is There a Text in This Class?* perhaps represents the easiest example of the kinds of theories that, according to Latour and Brooks, have paved the way for the actions described in their articles. While Latour and Brooks lament the possibility of knowledge without a foundation, the Fish of *Is There a Text in This Class?* remains profoundly nonchalant in his embrace of it. In "How to Recognize a Poem When You See One," for example, Fish flaunts his rather dazzling ingenuity as a critic while going well beyond Mary Poovey's complaint that critics exercising their ingenuity often fail to pay attention to the status of a text as an object: Fish happily denies the text as an object, taking a heaping spoonful of pleasure in causing—for some of his readers at least— the painful dissolution of a fantasy. Fish comes off rather like an atheist smiling gently to himself as he disabuses the rest of us of our childish religious notions.

Fish insists that texts are not, properly speaking, objects—"that all objects are made and not found, and that they are made by the interpretive strategies we set in motion"—and that the categories of "objectivity" and "subjectivity" are "unhelpful," because they "assume [. . .] the very distinction between interpreters and the objects they interpret." Fish's reader-response-driven theory centers on the same problem Poovey gets stuck on in "Recovering Ellen Pickering": the nature of the relationship between

interpreter and object of interpretation. As is noted in the above quotation, Fish's position is that there isn't a distinction between the two, and he takes up the most extreme version of Latour's original project of "*emancipat*[*ing*] the public from prematurely naturalized objectified facts." In doing this, Fish puts rather intense pressure on objectivity and subjectivity as categories, seeming to expect no fuzziness at their edges. When he finds that they can't measure up to being perfectly independent from each other, he deems them inadequate.

But Fish's refusal of the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity would seem to deny the fact that objectivity is not only a final product but also—at least as it manifests itself in the sciences—made up of a set of practices, like "the keeping of a lab notebook with realtime entries," that work together to diminish subjectivity's influence on our perception of the object at hand (Daston 38). As Lorainne Daston and Peter Galison put it, "To be objective is to aspire to knowledge that bears no trace of the knower" (with "aspire" being a key word here), and it therefore involves the creation of practices that will allow the researcher to purposefully and tediously dismantle the assumptions and customs of the "interpretive community" from which they hail (17). One of Fish's examples of how objects are made and not found is the fact that, while "you might think that when you're on campus [. . .] that you are simply walking around on the two legs God gave you," you are constantly interpreting the phenomena around you: "It would never occur to you, for example, to wonder if the people pouring out of that building are fleeing from a fire; you *know* that they are exiting from a class (what could be more obvious?) and you know that because your perception of their action occurs within a knowledge of what people in a university could possibly be doing and the

reasons they could be doing it" (1904). While one might not be objective in one's everyday approach to this kind of event, it's something else to say that this isn't also an object that could be studied, and that particular procedures in the social sciences, like, say, operational definitions,[59] wouldn't allow for it to be studied relatively objectively.

I have given so much space to Stanley Fish in particular because the intellectual exercise he undertakes in "How To Recognize A Poem When You See One" is one deeply skeptical of the knowledge required by modern universities. That is, while Fish's is an intellectual exercise, it's haunted by its enormous institutional stakes. This has continued to haunt the work of more recent literary critics, who struggle to reconcile the "the changing nature of (what counts as) objectivity in the modern academy" with literary criticism and wonder about "the degree to which literary criticism claims either to be objective or to describe objects that have essential properties like 'literary value.'" (Poovey 451). Many of the critics who have grappled with this problem have struggled to develop new methods to help with seeing the literary object more clearly, but time-tested close reading also comes up frequently, and in fact is alternately praised and maligned as the key to more accurate readings. Stein Haugom Olsen turns back to close reading in "Progress in Literary Studies," in which he argues that close reading, as a means of seeing the text more clearly, must be thought of as institutionally necessary; without it,

[59] An example of an operational definition: in a (very hypothetical) study of whether children with a larger vocabulary experience greater emotional well-being, researchers would need to operationally define vocabulary size and emotional well-being in order to attain meaningful results. An operational definition in this case might be: vocabulary size is measured by a child's score on a predetermined vocabulary test. Or the researchers could measure relative vocabulary size by counting the number of discrete words a child used when given a defined period of time (say two minutes) to narrate their favorite memory. Having an operational definition of vocabulary size allows researchers to meaningfully study the relationship between the two variables: vocabulary size and emotional wellbeing.

literary studies can never meet the prerequisites for inclusion as an academic discipline. Taking as premises that "the modern research university [. . .] sees the production of new knowledge as its primary function," and that "the natural sciences set the standards for what is to count as knowledge and how such knowledge is validated," Olsen concludes glumly that this "presents a problem for the academic discipline of literary studies" (341). It is a problem that critics like I. A. Richards attempted to remedy by developing close reading as a technique:

> Analytic close reading is, as was pointed out above, a method of observation directed towards the object of study and as such it serves an epistemic purpose. Through that method the reader 'grasps' or apprehends the literary work. It is an unavoidable stage in the identification and recognition of the object of study. Analytic close reading is systematized observation. (353)

But though close reading might constitute a movement toward the demands the modern research university places upon academic criticism, it has both failed to epistemically ground literary studies since the heyday of new criticism in the mid-20th century and created "a paradox for literary studies that literary criticism, insofar as it serves the epistemic function of identifying, apprehending, and appreciating the object of study, is something all good readers do" (355).[60]

[60] I take issue with Olsen's articulation of this paradox for two reasons. First, he collapses reading and interpretation, ignoring the fact that "full comprehension and reading do not co-occur" (*Gist* 58). Second, it's unclear what his bases are for arguing that close reading skills do not improve with continued training and that the cognitive capacity to employ those skills does not constitute a sort of disciplinary expertise. For the purposes of this portion of my argument, however, I am most interested in Olsen's position that close reading most closely mimics the observational methods of the natural sciences that constitute the standard for production of knowledge in the academy.

While Olsen points out institutional problems with close reading, what interests me here is his argument that close reading is the most effective methodological tool literary critics have to clearly and "correct[ly]" perceive the literary text as object (353). Franco Moretti has notably flipped this on its head to advocate for a movement away from close reading toward distant reading, in part because close reading "necessarily depends on an extremely small canon" that does not represent a full range of literature ("Conjectures"). Moretti employs quantitative methods that allow him to focus—and in his opinion focus more clearly—on what he considers as a truer object of study: a significantly broader, statistically significant body of literature. Heather Love endorses Moretti's turn away from the "messy intimacies of traditional forms of humanistic inquiry" and close reading in particular (which troubles her as a vehicle for the "ethical charisma of the critic"), arguing for the introduction of social-scientific methods meant to diminish the critic's subjective input into the interpretive process ("Close" 374, 387). In other words, Love understands close reading as a mechanism for projecting the critic into their criticism, a tool of subjective interpretation rather than observational, potentially objective, description. While Olsen, Moretti, and Love interpret the *results* of close reading differently, their reasons for re-examining its effectiveness (and the terms in which they conduct that examination) are largely the same: they all seek a method that will effectively force the subjective critic to butt out, leaving the text unsullied. Where Fish argued that text and critic couldn't be separated, these critics attempt to establish a solid boundary between them. All three are interested in bringing literary studies closer to the literary text (or corpus of texts) as object. While they disagree on how to achieve it, they share the goal of establishing methods for more "accurately" describing literary texts

and literary history, and seek to bring literary studies into line with what Olsen sees as the expectations of the modern research university.

Moretti and Love both attempt to move toward accuracy by changing the terms of the relationship between text and critic. Moretti does this by moving away from our usual definitions of both subject and object. He changes his objects of study from individual texts to networks of literary-historical relationships, and in doing so broadens the selection of texts we can feasibly work with beyond a canon that, relative to the amount of literature available, "fail[s] against even the most generous requirements for statistical significance" (Ramsay 3). Meanwhile the critic, the usual subject, becomes a critic aided by what Moretti considers the relative objectivity of computing and quantitative methods more generally—that is, a less subject-y subject. Moretti's method for dealing with the problem of the text-critic relationship, then, is to try to disappear it. But while he attempts to avoid it, he often ends up relying (without acknowledging it) on the old problematic relationship between critic and text anyway. In "Graphs," for instance, Moretti uses distant reading to chart shifts in dominant genres across the 18th- and 19th- centuries. While Moretti himself doesn't closely read any texts in the essay, the bibliography of dozens of scholarly books on genre that he relies upon to support his claims represents thousands of hours its authors have spent looking closely at texts. Moretti would not be able to make his distance reading argument if not for these thousands of hours of labor, but he doesn't address how the close reading done by others fits into his model; shifting away from this old relationship doesn't make it stop lurking in the background, impacting and even enabling the kinds of readings he can produce.

I will return to Love's work shortly, but first I'd like to consider another methodological intervention. In "Surface Reading: An Introduction," Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus attempt to introduce a method that, on the face of it, seeks to shift the balance of power in the critic-text relationship from critic to text. Best and Marcus use Frederic Jameson as their poster-boy for symptomatic reading, which they understand as assuming an adversarial relationship between text and critic in which the critic maintains power and agency by unveiling the text's hidden ideology. Best and Marcus push to give texts more agency and make critics more submissive by starting from the assumptions that the text's meaning exists on the surface of the text and that the critics' job is to describe it as accurately as possible. What ultimately trips Best and Marcus up, though, is another version of a complaint they make about Jameson, which is that Jameson argues that the text harbors ideology that must be excavated, but also "takes as his mission the task of rewriting texts in terms of a master code" (3, 15). Jameson both locates meaning inside of the text and rewrites texts to mean within his mastercode; he attempts to have his hermeneutical cake and eat it too. Best and Marcus attempt to separate critic and text long enough to establish a clear and ideal relationship between them, but also end up with a confused argument about the source of textual meaning.

The confusion in Best and Marcus, as well as in Jameson (at least the Jameson of their interpretation) comes at least in part from the use of a spatial metaphor as a stand in for a text:

> Following the lead of our contributors, we take surface to mean what is evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts; what is neither hidden nor hiding; what, in the geometrical sense, has length and breadth but no thickness, and therefore covers

> no depth. A surface is what insists on being looked *at* rather than what we must train ourselves to see *through*. (9, emphasis in original)

This is a fascinating description that works to shift our relationships with texts by establishing text and critic as separate entities (the text is an object with spatial qualities in its own right, the critic is a subject who mentally examines that object) and to direct the critic to what part of the freestanding text she should attend. But the problem here is that even as Best and Marcus attempt to establish the text as an object to be studied, they revert to defining it in terms of critical action. The predicate adjectives of the first part of the sentence—"evident," "perceptible," and "apprehensible"—grammatically refer to the text, but ultimately point back to the critic's cognition, so the definition that is supposed to describe how one might identify the "surface" of the text locates meaning not in the text itself but in the cognitive actions of the critic. "Perceptible" and "apprehensible" in particular easily convert to actions that the critic performs rather than features of the text, and there's a possibility of disparities in the results of these actions (deeming what is evident, what is perceptible, and what is apprehensible) despite the fact that they're presented as being synonymous or nearly so. In other words, these three separate actions might well lead to the identification of different surfaces. I don't nitpick at this wording out of any issue of the particular descriptors that get used, but rather to show the relentlessness with which cognitive actions of critics seep into descriptions of texts, even when critics try valiantly to develop tools (like spatial metaphors) to describe texts on their own terms.

The idea of a text having a "surface" and a "depth," which gives the abstract text physical qualities, is a kind of objectification designed to suggest that a text is a naturally

occurring object of the kind studied by scientists, something entirely pre-existent that the critic can stand back from and perceive plainly. But of course, textual "surface" is a metaphor that must be mapped onto textuality, and while Best and Marcus assume that the surface is what "in the geometrical sense, has length and breadth but no thickness," it's not entirely obvious what that corresponds to in a text. Best and Marcus, of course, are writing to introduce the work of others in the same special issue of *Representations*, but that work is also broad-ranging enough to make it non-obvious what "surface" means. In any case, the spatial metaphor, and the objectification of literature that comes with it, is at the root of the desire "to attain what has almost become taboo in literary studies: objectivity, validity, truth" (17). These three things are not synonyms, as Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison have been at pains to show in *Objectivity*, but as I have quoted above, Daston and Galison argue in the case of objectivity that "to be objective is to aspire to knowledge that bears no trace of the knower." The spatial metaphor that Best and Marcus use attempts to create an object of knowledge that allows for this shrinking of the knower. But texts don't work like other objects because they only come into being through a knower's cognition. Best and Marcus posit that "Sometimes our subjectivity will help us see a text more clearly, and sometimes it will not," but to some degree our subjectivity is always already present; the spatial metaphor of "surface" is not itself a description, but an interpretation of textuality. And, as Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison concede in *Objectivity*: "As long as knowledge posits a knower, and the knower is seen as a potential help or hindrance to the acquisition of knowledge, the self of the knower will be at epistemological issue" (18, 40). Knowledge in literary studies is absolutely dependent upon a knower; a knower is a prerequisite; texts without readers can't yield

knowledge. So while it's understandable to want to nix epistemological uncertainty by cutting out the knower, it's also unlikely to succeed.

I'd now like to return to Heather Love, who in "Close But Not Deep" writes approvingly of both Moretti's and Best and Marcus's methodological interventions, but who also proposes her own. Love identifies "new methods [. . .] that distance themselves from texts and from practices of close reading altogether," and, much like I have done above, identifies Franco Moretti as perhaps the most "polemical" member of this cohort (373). Arguing that close reading "serve[s] as a carrier for an allegedly superannuated humanism," Love embraces work like Moretti's that makes "a turn away from the singularity and richness of individual texts and a concomitant refusal of the ethical charisma of the literary translator or messenger," but suggests that "a complete renunciation of the text" might not be necessary (374, 375). Instead, Love wants our interpretations to be "close but not deep," for them to be the fruit of "Good descriptions [,which] are in a sense rich, but not because they truck with imponderables like human experience or human nature [. . .] rather than adding anything 'extra' to the description, they account for the real variety that is already there" (377). The imperative to read closely but not deeply comes with an imperative not to assume a "richness" in texts. Through interpretation, Love suggests, critics "attempt to produce [depth] in their readings, by attributing life, richness, warmth, and voice to texts" (388). In her reading of *Beloved*, Love highlights moments of flatness and documentation, including in the scene in which Beloved is murdered, when Love claims Morrison "lets the camera roll, recording circumstances and actions with minimal intervention" (384).

Love is perhaps the most measured of the critics I've been discussing here. Even as she argues for a turn to the sociological habit of "thin description," she acknowledges the difficulty in applying such a method in a pure sense, admitting that "There is no such thing as a 'pure' description, since every description entails an interpretation of some kind" (380). Love's position is also, perhaps, the one that comes closest to convincingly arguing for a how a method might create a stable relationship between critic and text, and how we might be able to characterize the kind of knowledge that comes out of that relationship. In part, this is because Love allows for slippage by denying the possibility of "pure description" and in part this is because Love is willing to explicitly commit to what is and is not part of the methodological system she describes. Love's method leaves me with questions, however. Most importantly, Love doesn't seem to acknowledge any difference between literature—particularly fiction—and real life. The idea that, in the scene in which Beloved is murdered, Toni Morrison "lets the camera roll, recording circumstances and actions with minimal intervention" is a head-scratcher. *Beloved* is based on historical events, but is of course fiction; there is no event to document, much less for Morrison to document "with minimal intervention." I wouldn't quibble so much about this metaphor if it weren't for the fact that Love doesn't account for the difference between literature—particularly fiction—and real life in a larger sense. Love embraces the methods of Erving Goffman and Bruno Latour, who she says "focus neither on individual agency nor on deep social structure" and "avoid discussion of underlying drives or essences and attend instead to gestures, traces, and activities," and seems to suggest that we apply these methods directly to literature as well (375). But literature, of course, is not real life. It often does represent "gestures, traces, and activities," but it is

neither documentary nor does it stop with these things. A sociologist studying an interaction between two people on the street (as happens in one of Love's examples from Goffman) has no access to their consciousness or felt experience, whereas fiction, which entails no commitment to accurate representation of a situation or event, frequently includes consciousness and felt experience. What is readily available to us when reading fiction is different from what's readily available when observing social interactions. The issues with this difference are implicit in Love's interpretation of *Beloved*, which focuses on flat portions of the novel while neglecting other portions. A method that starts as a commitment to flat descriptions of its object ends up having to avoid large portions of the object to function, and some of the methodological commitment ends up transferred onto the novel itself (Morrison's novel *is* "grounded in documentation and description rather than empathy and witness") (375). In her attempt to separate critic and text, Love has similar problems as Best and Marcus. There's the problem of fitting a sociological method onto literature, but there's also the problem of negotiating between the critic's methodological commitments and the meaning supposedly inhering in a text. In Love's reading of *Beloved*, we see the same confusion over where meaning inheres as we do with Best and Marcus.

Each of these pieces of writing articulates an interesting and sophisticated approach to problems in literary studies. But they also show the difficulty of building a methodology upon relatively static definitions of subject and object, critic and text. When critics attempt to hold these things entirely separate, often to justify the possibility of producing reliable knowledge about the text as object, the space between them collapses to some degree. Franco Moretti attempts to avoid the problem, but ends up letting it

linger in the background. With Best and Marcus and Heather Love, there are points at which it becomes difficult to tell whether something is a feature of a text or a technique employed by a critic. I will briefly propose a solution to this later, but first I'd like to return to the two affective moments with which I opened this chapter.

Conclusion

The two affective moments I described at the beginning of this chapter represent the problem of knowledge in literary studies. The moment I have described in the late eighteenth century is one in which Ann Radcliffe offers up a Romantic vision that seems to deliciously counter Enlightenment empiricism and the ongoing disenchantment of the world, then dismantles it through the device of the supernatural explained. By doing so, she deprives her audience of the fantasy of the enchanted world they'd previously supposed and returns them to the uncertainty of the period in which they lived. She does this not only by bursting the fictional fantasy of enchantment, but also by creating a text that self-consciously asserts the fact that only certainty is possible only in fictional worlds created by an author with total control over what is known. The Count attempts to control what is known by creating distance between himself and the mystery of Ludovico's disappearance. He does so by remaining emotionally detached, carefully observing, and not getting caught up in any one hypothesis. But through the Count's efforts at observation—specifically his stay in the chambers—he also becomes part of the mystery and entangled with it.

This entanglement returns me to the second moment I discussed above-—a more discrete one that opens upon the much larger "moment" of "crisis in the humanities"—the moment during the British Women Writers Conference when Mary Poovey denies

that Ellen Pickering's work should be "recovered" and many members of the audience balk, convinced that there's something about Ellen Pickering's voice that is worth having around, something inherently worthwhile about the novel *Nan Darrell*. Poovey worries that, in fact, "in so far as I've succeeded in making *Nan Darrell* interesting to you, I've done it by stressing—even exaggerating—this novel's anticipation of some of the concerns late-twentieth-century readers care about: gender, ambivalence, racial otherness" (449). Poovey's characterization of the problem of literary critics' relationships parallels Ann Radcliffe's representation of how knowledge works more broadly; whether it's knowledge about the world or knowledge about texts, entanglement is inevitable and epistemologically destabilizing. Poovey extends the possibility both of a version of literary criticism in which the literary object and the critic can be separated from one another, and of a version of literary criticism in which the text can't be fully separated from the critic because of uncertainty about whether the critic has simply exercised his or her own critical ingenuity by, for example, imposing concerns like "gender, ambivalence, [and] racial otherness" onto an otherwise unconcerned text. The methodological interventions I consider above play out this uncertainty: even as critics attempt to locate meaning solidly within the text, critical cognition worms its way in. This is the case with recovery too, as I'll consider a bit more below. The source of the audience's anxiety and anger, then, is just as much about Poovey's threat to their security in the effectiveness and importance of their method, and of the claim behind that method that texts have inherent value, as it is about Poovey denying Pickering canonical status. Poovey threatens her audience with the same kind of epistemological uncertainty with which Radcliffe threatens hers.

The moment that Poovey creates at BWW is more widely applicable to methodological life-cycles in literary criticism. Since the broader work of feminist scholars to recover women's texts is the test case for Poovey's questions in "Recovering Ellen Pickering," I'll also use it as an example here. As Jean Marsden reports, the work of recovery has made (and continues to make) an impact on the field of literary studies. In her "undergraduate and graduate years in the late 1970s and 1980s," she writes, she "did not study a single Restoration or eighteenth-century woman writer" (658). By 1999, teaching a seminar on "eighteenth-century women writers" meant "happily agoniz[ing] over which books to teach" (658). But Marsden also documents her developing uneasiness over a pattern she detects in recovery work, in which "the author presented a woman writer whom she had unearthed, described her work, and ultimately—inevitably—discovered that this early woman writer was a feminist" (658). Marsden finds herself concerned with the ways that feminist recovery projects have tended to "make value judgments regarding the worth of a woman's literary contribution based on her similarity to our own, late-twentieth-century ideology" (659). Marsden discovers the same pattern that troubles Poovey, although she doesn't as explicitly connect it to the same epistemological stakes quite as explicitly. According to her, recovery work that began from the assumption that women's texts have inherent value has become an exercise in which many critics impose their own critical values onto an essentially passive text. It's not always clear that critics can tell when they're doing what—drawing out features of a text versus practicing critical ingenuity upon it—and, more disturbing to Poovey, many critics don't seem to care to distinguish between the two practices anyway. And, importantly to the work of this dissertation, Marsden's concern takes on an affective

aspect. She describes her realization of this problem in emotional terms, using words like "disturbed" and "daunting" to document her reaction.

I argued above that methods often end up with muddy separations between critic and text when critics insist on a rigid separation between the two. Defining the object, then dictating how the critic can remain separate from it, is especially important because of the institutional and epistemological stakes involved. Without a clearly defined object and carefully controlled subject, it's not clear whether literary studies produces knowledge that meets the standards of the modern academy. But text and critic are more intertwined than your typical subject and object. A text comes to life through cognition, and reading isn't mere perception. Grappling with the complexity of the relationship while still arguing for grounded knowledge is difficult, and I am not proposing a catch-all solution here. Still, one way of rethinking this problem might be to move away from conceptualizing literary knowledge as only propositional (knowledge-that) in favor of considering literary-critical knowledge as at least partially procedural (knowledge-how). Of course, we already do this to some degree when it comes to close reading, particularly when it comes to teaching close reading, but in the case of the critics I've discussed here, the goal of producing propositional knowledge about a text has dominated.

In particular, considering literary criticism in terms of social scripts might be a useful way to negotiate meaningfully between subject and object. A classic script example is that of going to a restaurant. You know what to do when you enter a restaurant. There are a series of steps like waiting to be seated, picking up a menu, selecting drinks and perhaps appetizers, then choosing an entrée. You know what kinds of things the waiter might say and how you might reasonably reply. The exact script

might vary by cultural context, but for most people, some kind of general script holds pretty constant, and gives a broad outline of the situations you'll encounter and the social and cognitive skills you'll need to use to navigate them. But while a stable base of procedural knowledge is necessary for adults to navigate eating at a restaurant in a socially acceptable way, each meal also requires a fair bit of improvisation, and will create a dynamic exchange between restaurant-goer and the restaurant (influencing factors might include atmosphere, staff, food quality, timing, etc.), and thus will yield somewhat predictable but varied results. But though an ordinary restaurant-goer has a useful script for negotiating a restaurant, a restaurant critic with a lot of experience eating high-quality food in well-run establishments might, by having finer-grained expectations and mental tools at hand, have a much more nuanced interpretation of a given experience. The critic's experience of the restaurant and what they eventually write about it will be partly about the subjectivity of the critic, but will also be about the restaurant itself and about the critic's significantly more detailed version of the restaurant script (their professional know-how). When our critic publishes their review in *Bon Appetit*, readers know that their interpretation is to some degree subjective but also put stock in it because the critic has the experience and procedural know-how to evaluate the restaurant with more nuance than they can. Their readers have learned more about the restaurant, and in that way have something like propositional knowledge about it, but by reading their review they also have a finer-grained procedural knowledge as a result of following along with their methods of evaluation.

The advantage to thinking of the restaurant critic's knowledge as procedural is that we can then acknowledge his status as a subject, the slippage between himself and

the restaurant as separate entities (he is, in fact, part of the restaurant while he enjoys his meal), and the status of the restaurant as an object about which he can say something. The script, the critic's know-how about how to navigate a restaurant, allows for the restaurant to exist as a variation on a common theme, and for the critic's subjectivity to be reined in by the script. Notably, the critic also employs oodles of propositional knowledge—he knows what a good example of dish X tastes like and who else has made important variations on that dish. He knows what wine is appropriate to serve with it and what kind of fat it was cooked in.

To transition the analogy over to literary criticism: literary critics today largely avoid evaluation in favor of interpretation, but the analogy holds insofar as I am arguing for us to consider literary-critical work as an entangled kind of interaction between critic and text—one that neither maintains separation between the two nor collapses them into each other. Literary critics already have sets of procedures, many of which overlap significantly from critic to critic, that they follow when interacting with a text. There are two things that I am, importantly, not arguing: (1) I am not arguing that literary-critical knowledge isn't also propositional, and that propositional knowledge won't continue to be essential in how we think of the work we do. (2) I am not arguing for procedural knowledge as a method in and of itself—am not arguing for a revival of Stanley Fish-inspired reader response criticism. Rather, I am arguing that the entangled but notably scripted interaction between critic and text that I outline here should serve as a baseline epistemological assumption in the development of new methodologies. Critics and texts can't be fully separated from one another, nor do they fully collapse in on each other, with the second of these being made possible by procedural knowledge gained through

years of professional training. I am not arguing that there is a lack of methodological options available—I am simply arguing for a reorientation toward them. Rather than attempting to develop methodologies that force the critic apart from the text so as to see it more clearly, we should allow for the fact that methodologies will mediate between critic and text without fully separating them. And we should measure the value of a methodology not strictly on whether it can capture some facet of the text accurately, but on whether it builds upon a foundational assumption of the interaction between a subject and an object and in doing so teaches us more finely-tuned ways of reading and interpreting. Continuing to chase certainty by formulating more objective measures of interpretation will not help to alleviate a sense of disciplinary crisis, but only continue a cycle of methodological booms and busts that starts with excitement and ends with disappointment and sometimes outrage. Rather than cultivating certainty only to have our hopes dashed, we should embrace and manage uncertainty through procedural knowledge that keeps critical subjectivity from destroying the text as object while acknowledging the particular ingenuity each critic brings to her work.

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